TA TU COME BACK

a novel in text messages

374 texts sent to a deputy's cell phone

Moscow · 2006

Message 1

I lost it today! All the things she said… I *need* Lana! It's all so strange… I don't understand what's going on… I think… I think I love her…

Tonight I had a weird dream. She was in it. She embraced me gently, pulling me to her, and kissed me… And now I'm walking around in a complete daze. I only just now realized that I have been thinking about her for days ever since we met...

We met three months ago on an SMS forum. I was so bored and lonely… I just wanted to meet someone, anyone… We liked the same books, the same music, and we had the same problems…

My whole world is turned upside down! It's like the sky is just about to fall on my food head! Can it really be that I've fallen in love with a girl?! How could it be?! I never thought of girls like *that* before… I've just lost it… It's nonsense. Some sort of obsession… Maybe I'm just exhausted? Yes, I'll just go to sleep, it will all go away. It will pass, all I have to do is shut my eyes…

Message 2

"Hi…"
"Hi! How are you?"
"Fine. You?"
"Not bad. Going swimming today!"
"Cool. I'd like to go, too… with you… we should meet up soon."
"Yeah… It'd be interesting to have a look at you…"
"Really? Me too…"
"You're acting strange today."
"No. Everything's the same. Everything's OK."

Message 3

Yesterday when we were saying good-bye, she called me kitten! And suddenly... suddenly it wasn't just... maybe she does care about me? That thought is filling up my head and I can barely breathe. There's no air. This thought, it's like a knife that cuts right through my body; it's incredibly painful. I can't understand why... This thought is not letting me rest. I HAVE TO KNOW WHAT LANA MEANT. But how can I find out? I can't just ask her straight out. I'm so scared of losing her. What little I have. I don't want to lose her! No! I can't! No, no! I'm so tangled up… I don't even know what I want. Or what I don't want.

What's happening to me? I don't know what's happening to me, but I don't need any white knights in shining armor. I don't know what's happening to me, but I don't need any crystal castles in the sky. I don't know what's happening to me, but I don't need anyone anymore. Don't need ANYONE... except her.

Message 4

We messaged each other all day today. Phone money's run out now. Now I have to get some more money somehow to top off, and soon…

We talked about everything. It's weird, but I can't argue with Lana. Even if she said we should go rob a bank or blow up the White House and then fly off to some impenetrable tropical forest to live out the rest of our days, I would say yes straight away. I'm glad Lana hasn't thought up anything like that... or maybe I'm not so glad...

"It's so boring here, there's nothing to do," she wrote me.

"So come over here, it'll be fun," I answered, mustering up my courage.

I want to see her so much, to hear her voice.

"Have you lost it?! Go all the way to Moscow?!"

"What do you mean?"

Does she really live so far away? Or…or just not… no, no I can't even think about that. It scares me.

"It's too far! I mean, no offense or anything, I want to see you, too, but not before next summer."

"No offense taken," I lied. "Just an invitation…"

Message 5

It’s been pouring down rain all day. I’ve been sitting by the window sill, looking out the window. The sky is overcast, filled with grey storm clouds and sharp drip-dropping of rain… matches my mood exactly. It’s been raining all day long, and all day long I think about her… I feel like my heart is about to burst.

Message 6

I’ve been wanting to hear her voice for so long, and finally last night I called her. I was really nervous, but I did it. When I dialed her number, my heart was pounding so fast, I thought it was going to jump out of my sad little body and fly up into the sky.

The phone rang a long time. Once, twice, three times… if only it wouldn't happen... if only she didn't pick up... if only...

“Hello,” I finally hear.

I like her voice. It's gentle and confident at the same time. Strength and weakness. I like that combination, I like it a lot. I like her voice, precisely because it's *her* voice. I like her so much, because...

“Hello," I answer.

Damn it! I didn’t answer, I mumbled! My voice is shaky, my mouth dry. What should I do?!

My foolish thoughts are interrupted by a question: "How are you?"

“Everything’s good, I was walking with some friends in the park. Then I remembered you and decided to call you.”

I remembered you?! I didn’t *remember*! It’s impossible to *remember* someone if you are incessantly thinking about them.

“Everything here’s good, too. What’re you doing on the weekend?”

We chatted for about 15 minutes. I didn’t have a lot of money on my phone, just like usual... It's so easy to talk to her. It's never been so easy to talk with anyone like with Lana. But... I said everything wrong, not like how I'd wanted to say it. It's so hard to contain oneself, not to have a chance to really trust someone... What's going to happen now? I need Lana more and more with every day. I feel lonely more and more often. I can't go on like this. But what else can I do...?

Message 7

A person can hold her emotions inside only for so long. She's got to share it with someone. I couldn't keep quiet about it anymore. I just physically couldn't...

Kristina is my best friend. I know her whole life story. We always tell each other our deepest secrets, our hopes and our dreams. Will she be able to understand me this time?

“You’ve been acting weird lately. What’s up?” she asked me the last time we talked on the phone.

I can’t answer anything.

“Why aren’t you saying anything?”

“Kris…” I start, weakly.

I am not sure about her at all, about me, about Lana, about my feelings for Lana, about whether or not I should tell Kristina.

“How do you know if you’ve fallen in love with someone,” I ask, cowardly.

“I don’t know… just tell me, what happened?”

“I don’t even know what to say..." I say, and them I am quiet.

Really, what *can* be said? How do you explain it?

“…well… I’m not really sure.. I don’t know.. I think I like this one person…”

“Well, so what's the big deal? What a freakin’ tragedy! So who is he? Do I know him? Tell, tell!”

“It’s not a he. It’s a she…” I whisper.

Complete and utter silence takes over the phone line. A deathly silence.

“What? What are you talking about?” is all Kristina can say.

“I like a girl,” I say. Kristina says nothing. “Lana." It seems to get even quieter. And then I whisper: "I think I'm in love with her..."

“Well… I don't know what to tell you... I mean, how’d you…? I don’t get it… I mean, I don't have anything against lesbians, but... it *is* your life after all..." Kristina was just blurting things out.

Would she turn her back on me? I couldn't stand it if she did.

"So what exactly are you telling me? You aren't going to talk to me anymore? I'm not your best friend anymore?"

There is a long, heavy silence. We are quiet for about 15 minutes, the longest 15 minutes of my life. I don't know anything anymore. I can't know anything anymore. What's going to happen now?

"It's your life," Kristina says finally. "Love who you want to. I don't care. You're my best friend and I accept you any way you are… even though I don't understand it..."

"So… everything's OK? Everything will be like before," I exhale.

"Probably… well, I hope so."

I felt so much better after I told Kris everything. I realized that there is someone who accepts me the way I am, who will always support me. That's so important.

I don't believe in the power of love so much, but I totally believe in the power of friendship.

Message 8

Now every time I talk with Kristina, the conversation somehow turns to Lana. It's not a bad thing at all, really, now that I can share this with someone. Even if this someone doesn't always understand...

When I opened up, I felt so much better. But now I feel that loneliness coming back. Sure, Kristina listens to me, gives me her advice, but she doesn't understand. And sometimes she blurts out a nasty joke. Not on purpose. It just comes out… She doesn't understand what I feel. No one can understand…

My thoughts are full of Lana, and all I can think about is meeting her. "You know, maybe if you finally meet, you'll see that you don't love her at all. Maybe you fell in love with some idea that you made up, or maybe you just wanted to fall in love with someone, and along came Lana - the perfect person, just what you'd always imagined. She doesn't even really have a *gender* to you," Kristina said one day. Yeah... I guess it could be like that. But how do I really know? How can I see Lana?

I want so much to touch her, to feel her breathing, to taste her lips… No! I cannot go on like this! I am losing my mind! If I haven't lost it already, that is… This obsession has to fizzle out, or it's going to dig itself even deeper into my skin and become one with my body.

I want to see her so badly. So badly…

Message 9

I. Love. Lana. Maybe I had some hope before that none of this is true, it's all just imagined. Not anymore. Those hopes are irrevocably and indubitably over and done for. The brick fortress of my hope couldn't sustain the pressure any longer and crumbled at the first major strike. It is destroyed, down to its very foundations, and the bricks are tiny, burnt pebbles that have exploded outward. There's nothing I can do now. I can't turn back time...

I was sitting in physics class, doodling. I took my pink pen and started drawing something. Just drawing, without really paying attention to *what* I was drawing. There was nothing else to do. I hate physics, it's boring and totally incomprehensible. Incomprehensible, just like Lana. But I love Lana… I didn't even notice when I drew a heart with open arms pointed up towards the sky and huge, sad eyes. And I had drawn something next to the heart, something like walls... My own hand made that picture, and I hadn't been thinking of anything in particular at the moment... Sasha, who had been asleep the entire class (she's got it easy! just covered her face with her long, blonde hair and fell asleep; not like anyone's going to notice, anyway... I wonder if Lana has hair like that, soft and full?) woke up and looked at my notebook.

"Well looky here," Sasha stretched out in her typical manner. "And who are we in love with?"

Interesting... such quick conclusions!

"What are you talking about? I'm not in love with anyone! What gives?"

"Just a question…" she sat up straight, with a very intelligent, mysterious expression. "In my spare time, I read a lot of books. Like about psychology, for example..."

Sasha? Reading 'smart' books? In her free time? Like when she's dying her hair or doing her nails?

"What's that got to do with me?"

"You know, you can tell a lot about a person by what they draw, like what's bothering you."

"Right. So you're a psychologist now, are you? Tell me what's bothering me, then." I challenged.

“You love someone, but there’s something standing in the way between you and him. Or at least that's what you think."

“I’m not in love with anyone! Your psychology is a bunch of crap!” I blurted out, blushing.

“Sure you do, I can see it in your eyes, baby…”

Man, did she ever hit the nail on the head! Goddamn subconscious! Whatever. Doesn’t mean anything anyway. She only made one little mistake. She said there’s something standing in the way between me and him, but really it's between me and *her*...

I just have to meet with Lana. It’s the only way I can figure myself out. The only way…

Message 10

I’m so lonely, it keeps getting worse. I’m not like everyone else. I feel like I’ve been put inside some kind of glass box. Just when I try to get close to someone, I run into these invisible walls. I scream, but no one hears me. I’m not myself. I’m not my own. I’m not anybody’s. I’m all alone. There is only me, and this vague feeling.

Everyday and every night I ask myself the same question: why? But I can’t find an answer. Maybe the answer is with Lana... but to go there, I'll need to be strong, to be brave. But I'm not, I never was.

Message 11

“Lana, what do you think about friendships by text messaging?" I ask, trying to understand something.

“If I’m talking with you, then it’s all good. I like that…”

Goddamn cellular providers! I only got half of her message! I wait for a minute. Two. Three, five, ten, fifteen… What is it she likes?

“That there are no strings attached. If you get tired of it, you can stop talking anytime without any explanation.”

No! No, you can’t! You can’t do that with me! It hurts so much! This feeling, as if Lana decided to use my heart to prop open a window. She just wanted a nice, warm breeze. That’s all... and the heart is caught, squeezed. It hurts. I'm such an idiot!

“I think you can find true friends by text messaging.”

“You know, I think I’ve already found a real friend."

Message 12

It’s like some sort of nightmare! I keep drawing little hearts everywhere, all the time! Today I ruined Sasha’s textbook - now all of the pages are covered in a thick layer of hearts. She nearly killed me. And Sveta can't stand the sight of hearts anymore at this point.

During chemistry, she kept laughing when she saw what was between the formulas and the chemical reactions, where yet another group of hearts had been most unceremoniously inserted. I've made everyone sick and tired of it all... can I really be in love? I keep calling everyone Lana by mistake... No matter what I do, it all comes back to her. I'm probably crazy. I should see a doctor or something.

I feel like I won’t be able to live till summer. I just want to meet Lana. But what will I say to her? After all, she doesn't know about any of this at all…

Message 13

Lana always calls me ‘Kitten.’ What can it mean?

“Hmm… maybe she likes you? Or maybe she’s some sort of pervert…Interesting… no, really, what if she *is* a lesbo? You should find out! I mean, what if she started hitting on you or something? Gross!"

“Oh, stop it, Sasha! Lana’s straight. There’s nothing wrong with her. And what’s the matter, anyway, you got something against gays and lesbians?”

“No, as long as they stay away from me.”

"…no, really. I want to know what you think."

"About what?"

"I mean do you think Lana likes me?"

"How the hell should I know? She's your friend, not mine! Maybe she does… I hope *you're* not *that way*."

"What are you, an idiot?! There's nothing wrong with me!"

"Well who would know? Whatever, no offense, OK? I was just kidding…"

Message 14

I am breathless from the taste of wine, from my impropriety. Whatever's happening to me can't be good. It's very bad. It's nasty. I disgust myself. It's disgusting! Nasty! Evil! Revolting! I don't want to live. How can I live like this, anyway? How can I live in love with someone I've never even met? How can I live in love with someone who doesn't love me back? How can I live in love with a girl… if I'm a girl, too… It's just so awful. I want to forget everything. I want to be like a snake, and crawl out of my old skin, and live like I did before Lana. Like nothing ever happened at all… But I can't - I can't! It's crushing my lungs, and I can no longer breathe easily. My thoughts are all tangled up, spinning around my head at the speed of light, and I don't have the strength to see what's what. Just the taste of wine, the constant taste of wine sitting quietly in a dark corner of my soul. It doesn't go anywhere, and it looks at me with its tiny, frightening eyes. When will it finally leave?! This can't go on forever! Why me?! I'll probably burn on a stake like a witch in the middle ages for my forbidden, sacrilegious feelings! I don't want this… Please… please, don't… Let me go, Lana…

Message 15

"Hey…"

"Hi there, Kitten."

"Why 'kitten'?" my voice wavered.

Tell me why? Don't torture me.

"I don't know… just you remind me of a kitten… You're so helpless and gentle… If you don't like it, I won't call you that anymore..."

"No! I like it… a lot…"

I feel like bursting into tears, and I don't know why. She'll hear it, she'll definitely hear my heart pounding away… Why? There's a pause. Too long. Too torturous. I hear Lana breathing. I want to say something, and I want her to answer something… But what?

"So how are you?"

Could I have thought of a stupider question?! That's not what I wanted to ask her. Not it at all. But I just can't make myself ask something else… So all I'm left with is that idiotic "so how are you?"

"Everything's good… you?" Did she want to ask something else, too? No. She can't. She can't know. Ever…

"Things are good here, too."

But I'm thinking: *"…only I'm so lonely without you, I'm going crazy alone, I live only with thoughts of you…"* Like that! Her voice! But there's a frog in my throat. I can't say anything now. The words were on the tip of my tongue. But not now. Not now. But…

"You know, I…"

No! I can't say it!

"What? What is it? Tell me…"

Is it me, or is her voice trembling? Why? Why are tears falling from my eyes? Why are my lips trembling?

"Oh.. no, it's nothing… just nothing… well, bye."

"Bye…"

Tears are raining from my eyes, burning my cheeks. My heart is breaking…

Message 16

Day. Night… Night. Day… Everything is the same. Time is stretching out into infinity. Nothing changes. Just these black, grey days… I just sit and veg out in front of the TV. More

endless ads… Ads, ads, ads! Enough is enough! I'm so sick of everything! Then I hear some familiar music... it's '*disabled people'* by t.A.T.u… some special concert… A record release party for t.A.T.u.'s new album at the club Gaudi?! Now this is interesting! I've been waiting for this forever! We have waited so long… Lana and I… I really, really want her to go with me. Then I could tell her everything… I couldn't stay quiet any longer… I can't stay quiet any longer. We *have* to go there together, otherwise these heavy, grey days and nights are never going to end. Never.

Message 17

"Hi! Kris, I gotta talk with you ASAP! I just got this crazy idea."

"What now?"

"Did you see the ad for t.A.T.u.'s new record release concert at Gaudi?"

"Yep. So?"

"You gonna go?"

"Jane, are you kidding me? Where am I gonna get the money?! Sure it would be awesome to see the t.A.T.u. chicks live, but I'm broke... So I take it *you're* going?"

"I'm going, and that's why I'm calling you…"

"Because…why?"

"I have been saving money for a long time… maybe I should get two tickets..."

"You wanna buy me a ticket? Hey, I won't stop you. I'd go."

"No! I don't want to go with *you*!"

"What?! You've got some nerve, then!"

"No! I mean. I mean, I want to go with you, but… how do I say this… no offense, right? Just let me finish."

"Fine, bitch, finish. So who will be replacing your best friend?"

"Well I wanted to invited Lana. What do you think?"

"Well, if Lana… I dunno. I really don't know, I need to think…"

"So you think she'd say no?"

"That's not what I said…"

"KRIS!!! C'mon, help me out here! I need your advice. The tickets might sell out. I wanted to go buy them tomorrow. Help!!"

"Maybe Lana will say yes… I don't know… Try it... she's a fan, too, right? It might be a good way to tell her evreything... I don't really know.

"Yeah… I guess I'll buy them… I want to see her so bad…"

"Then go get the tickets… Only I can't cover for you. Me and the old folks are going out of town for the weekend…"

"No need to cover for me, I'm not going to tell them anything. I'll call 'em from the club. If Lana can't come, then you can have her ticket..."

"Geez, thanks a lot! You're soooo generous! So go get your tickets, already. I'm crossing my fingers for you. Call me after you talk to her, OK?"

Message 18

"Hey…"

"Hi, what's up?"

"Did you know that t.A.T.u. is gonna have a record release party on the 28th?"

"Well, yeah. Saw it on the tube…"

"I got two tickets. For you and me… come to Moscow!"

"Have you lost your mind?! I can't! No one will let me go! Where will I get money for the ticket?!"

"Well, make something up… don't you want to see the concert?... or me?..."

"I do. I really do…but what should I say?"

– "I don't know. Make something up… we have the tickets. And there's less than a week left… I'll be waiting…"

Message 19

She hasn't called and she hasn't written. It's like time has completely frozen. The endless grey days have returned. There's only a few days left before the concert. Lana isn't coming. She's not coming. Ever… What am I going to do now? What now? It's so cold outside. It's snowing. Everything is grey. I'm so alone… Nothing is ever going to change. Ever… God, what an idiot I am for hoping that something good would happen to me. It never will. My life is always going to be grey and lonely, like that street outside... Lana isn't coming...

Message 20

"Did I wake you up?"

"No, I was just getting ready for bed. So? You coming???"

"I'm coming! I'm coming!"

"YES!!! All right!

"I still can't believe it myself."

"How did you manage it? So they're letting you go?"

"I made arrangements with this one classmate, and we told my mom that I'm going to her dacha for the weekend. She *barely* let me go. I can't *stand* her. She thinks everything should be exactly the way she wants it. *Hold ON!"*

"Where'd you get the money for the ticket? Did your mom give it to you?"

"Yeah right! She's given me money, like, two times. I can't even get two bucks outta her for a lousy stick of lip gloss. All she can think of is saving for her stupid house out in the boondocks. Fantastic. As long as she doens't think I'm moving out there with her!"

"So where'd you get the money then?"

"I just got it. It's not important. I borrowed from some good people. It's enough for the ticket and a party."

"Awesome! When are you coming?"

"The morning of the 28th. At 10:50 I think. I'll write you from the train, and we can arrange everything."

"OK. I'll be waiting. I'll definitely come pick you up. Good night!"

"Good night, Kitten."

Message 21

I can't believe it! She's coming!! Lana wrote me about it last night, when I'd already gone to bed… I can't believe it! She's coming and I'm going to tell her everything. Everything. Doesn't even matter what she looks like. I really don't care. I love her. The only important thing is that we see each other. We'll be together… and to hell with everything else. I want to be with Lana, I don't care if the whole world is against me… As long as she doesn't reject me... I won't be able to deal if she says she doesn't want to talk to me anymore. I just won't be able to deal. I'll cut my wrists…

Message 22

"She's coming! She's coming! Can you believe it?!" I scream into the phone.

OK. So maybe it wasn't the best idea to call Kristina at 9:00am on a Sunday…

"Great! ...d'you think you could have called any earlier?" Kristina growls.

"Oops.. Sorry. I wasn't thinking."

"As usual," Kristina laughed sleepily. "Well go on, then. Tell me what happened."

"Lana is coming on the morning of the 28th. She got some money for the ticket and other stuff, and told her mom she's going to a classmate's dacha. It's so awesome, I can't believe it. I'm so happy!"

"I'm happy for you. Now you'll get a good look at her. What will you do if you don't like her?" Kris asked, now awake.

"I don't know… I really don't care what she looks like… I'll like her any way she is," I said thoughtlessly.

I really don't care what she looks like. Ever if she turns out to be a cross-eyed cripple with a hunchback, I won't care. I'm going to love her anyway…

"So are you going to tell her?"

"I don't know… I'm kinda scared."

"Well it's up to you, but I think you should tell her everything. You'll feel better. You won't get lost in all the 'what-ifs' anymore. Everything will become crystal clear. I really think you should tell her…"

"I don't know. We'll see. Maybe I will tell her."

Message 23

Here we are, the morning of the 28th. I couldn't sleep all night long. I keep thinking about Lana. I can't believe we're finally going to meet today. It's finally going to happen! All night long I thought about what I will wear, what makeup I'll put on, how to do my hair. I think it came out pretty good... But what if she doesn't like me? What if she has a boyfriend, and she comes with him? No! I can't even stand to think about that! I'm scared… When will she send me the next text?

"Awesome! I'll be at the station in about two hours." It's as if she were reading my thoughts and answered right away.

Oh my God! Just two hours left! I'm finally going to see her!

"Hey! So when exactly are you getting in and where should we meet?" I'm practically burning with impatience, happiness and anxiety. I type the text with hands shaking.

"The train gets in at 10:50, let's meet on the platform. Find the arrival platform for the train from Stari Luk, and wait there, OK?"

"OK. What do you look like?"

"Long, light hair, about 175 cm tall. I'm wearing a dark blue jacket lined with fur and black jeans with patches. What about you?"

Based on her description, she is *really* cute! I cannot wait to see her!

"Light brown shoulder-length hair, 165cm tall. I'll be in a beige knee-length coat and grey jeans with rips.

"Cool. Don't be late!"

No way, no how will I be late! I'm practically running there already! I'm practically flying! Fast as I can to embrace Lana, my Lana...

Message 24

Just five more minutes before the train arrives. It's like time is totally standing still! I can't wait anymore! Nobody understands... People are running endlessly up and down the platform, they don't have any idea, they don't care that in just a few, teeny tiny minutes, I'm going to have the most important meeting of my entire life. I am going to meet my beloved… Any minute now…

I can't believe it! It's happening! The train is so close now, it's almost here. Oh please, don't let anything happen. What if it stops somewhere, and doesn't reach the station? What if it doesn't bring my Lana to me? I don't care, I'll walk the difference and climb in to her through the window... What is this, anyway? Why would a train stop just a few meters from the platform? Christ, I'm such an idiot... It's here. Now all of the passengers will come out… and her. She's getting out now! I'm finally going to see her! Oh, my heart is *stomping* in my chest, it's going to jump right out of me! My hands are shaking. I may very well just die right here from anxiety. Right here on this platform. And I'll never have seen Lana...

People start coming out one by one. Children, old grannies, some family… not her. Then I think I spot a blonde… nope! That's not Lana, she's wearing a skirt. Where is Lana?! One of the last people to finally exit is a cute girl. She is carrying almost nothing with her, just a backpack. A tall blonde in a dark blue jacket and patched pants... It can't be... can it be? Is it Lana? She steps onto the platform and starts looking for someone. She has such a confident gaze, almost predatory. She sees me, thinks for about 10 seconds, and comes up to me and asks:

"Are you Jane?"

Yes! Yes-yes-yes! It's her, it's Lana!

"Yeah, and you're Lana?" I croaked, unable to take my eyes off her.

She’s so sweet…

“We finally meet,” Lana smiles and gives me a hug.

At this moment, I feel like my heart has stopped beating, like the whole world has stopped. There’s no more noise, no clatter of voices around me, all of the hustle and bustle of the train station has vanished, even the trains are gone. It’s just me and Lana. She has such soft, strong hands. Strength and weakness. My favorite combination. I would have stood their forever, holding her close with all of my body, relaxed, softened, with Lana. Oh, to die in her embrace…

“So, where are we going?" Lana asked happily, still looking at me.

Everything good comes to a swift end. Our embrace didn’t last too long. Shame…

“Where do you want to go? We’ve got plenty of time. We can walk around Moscow, we could go to a café, or to my place. My parents’ll be working late today. There’s no one home.” I don’t know why I blurted that out.

I really wanted Lana to see my apartment. I don’t know why.

“Well, I’ve already seen Moscow. I came with my mom a couple of times on tours… It’s all right, as far as cities go. Nothing extraordinary. Stary Luki is much better. We’ve got real nature there, real grass, live trees. Not like here. Everything here is so artificial. Plastic… Sorry… Let’s go sit around somewhere for a while, and then go to your place. I really wanna see where you live,” Lana smiled sweetly.

Her eyes twinkled craftily. If only I knew what it meant.

“Let’s go!" I said. Like always, I couldn’t resist Lana.

Message 25

We’re sitting in a cozy little café, eating ice cream. I can’t take my eyes off Lana. Her hair is so soft, oh, to run my fingers through it… She has such sensual lips. Lana isn’t like me at all, she’s not quiet or reserved. She’s energetic, daring, you can tell right away that she always gets what she wants. I’m not afraid of anything with Lana. I learn that she plays sports, and loves to ski. I only got Cs in P.E. I can’t even do one push-up.

“You’re just like I imagined you’d be," Lana pronounces.

“Really?” I blush. I blush a lot, maybe too much. “You're not like what I thought.”

“What did you think I would be like?” she asks, suddenly looking me straight in the eye. I can’t look away, it’s like she’s hypnotized me. Lana, do whatever you want with me. “How do you like the real me, the original?"

“You’re really pretty. I mean it.”

As long as she doesn’t know, as long as she doesn’t…

“I think you’re really pretty, too,” Lana smiles.

Her smile puts a spell on me, makes me prepared to do anything for the sake of that smile... There's a long pause. We look at each other without saying a word.

“So when does it start,” Lana asks, breaking the silence.

“At nine, but we should get there earlier… We still have a lot of time. I can’t wait to see t.A.T.u. with their new album! I gotta get Lena’s autograph, and see if I can get a picture with her…”

“Yeah,” Lana mumbles, as if lost in thought. "We'll meet them. Somehow... "

I wonder, how does she do it?

“How?” I ask shyly. “How do you plan to meet them?”

“I don't know yet, but I'll meet them. You don't know me too well yet. I didn't come here for nothing," Lana smiled slyly.

I had no doubt in my mind then - she was going to meet them.

“How about going to your place, then?” Lana asked, getting up from the table.

“Sure,” I said, and my heart squeezed ever-so-sweetly.

Message 26

So now we’re at my place. Not bad. There’s no one here. It’s quiet - perfect. We go into my room. The walls are covered with t.A.T.u. posters.

“Nice room… you’ve got a lot of posters. I’ve got more, though,” Lena laughs.

“It drives my mom crazy. She thinks t.A.T.u. are these filthy perverts. I haven’t even told her about the concert. She’d lock me up in handcuffs and strap me to the heater. I’ll just call her from the club once we're there. She wants to see me married off ASAP, and she thinks t.A.T.u. is keeping that from happening. Like I’m suddenly going to become a lesbian… well, that’s her problem,” I said, sitting cross-legged on the bed.

“Mine can’t freaking stand them either, but all she can really think about is that goddamned house… So, anyway, *have* you become a lesbian?” Lana asked, smiling strangely, lying on the bed.

“Of course not,” I lied, lying next to her.

She’s so close. I can feel her body. I might go crazy, if I haven’t gone crazy already…

“So you’ve never been with a girl?” Lana asked unexpectedly. She turned toward me.

"Nope, never. You?"

“Me either… would you ever want to?”

My face is next to hers. I can feel her breathing. Her lips are so close. Suddenly my throat is dry. There is an uncomfortable pause. The silence is so thick with tension that my ears start to ring. Maybe it’s because I’m so close to her lips. I look into her green eyes, and for a second they seem crazy to me. I look at her strawberry lips, and for a second it seems as though they want to touch mine. My vision starts to darken… But no, it’s not getting darker. Everything around me becomes strawberry-colored, the same color as her lips… No… I can’t. It’s not right. Just not yet, anyway… We turn away from each other at the same time. I get up and put the kettle on. I need to cool off…

Message 27

Lana asked to lie down. I put her in the guest room to let her rest. She's tired. Who wouldn't be after traveling for so long. We have all night long to hang out… Maybe I should get some rest, too… Although I probably wouldn’t be able to sleep… I’m all confused. I don’t know what to think, I don’t know what to feel… It’s all wrong, somehow. Kris told me I should tell Lana everything. That I’ll feel better. Either that, or it will all be over, and I won’t torture myself any longer with these futile hopes, or... I don't know. I don't know anything. I’m so confused… Maybe Kris is right...

It’s so cold and harsh outside. More stupid snow is falling… Why is the sky so grey? Why is the world so cold and unjust? It’s not fair. Not fair. That’s all I can do now, just repeat the same stupid words: not fair. Just as stupid as the grey snow that keeps falling outside… All I can do is talk… I can’t actually *do* anything. I’m not Lana. She would surely do whatever she wanted, she wouldn’t just mutter “it’s not fair.” I’m just sitting here by the windowsill, listening to "show me your love." Snow is falling and I want to cry... I was right, I should go sleep a little. Maybe then I can forget all of this crap for a while... Maybe... I just need to lie down and close my eyes... and it will all pass... even just for a minute...

Message 28

“She’s here. Lana’s at my place… sleeping. She’s really tired and I decided to let her rest a little,” I said, lying on Kris’s sofa. Since I couldn’t fall asleep, I left Lana asleep and went to Kristina’s place.

"You sound so depressed. What, did Lana turn out to be horrible? Or doesn't she like you?" she asked, drinking her tea.

“No, I really like her a lot. She’s great looking… And I think she likes me too,” I tell her with a flat voice.

“So what’s the problem? What’s going on with you?” Kris looked at me, concerned.

What’s going on? If only I knew what’s going on… I am so confused…

“I don't know. I don’t know anything anymore… Kristina, what should I do? I’m confused…” I tell her and lie my head on Kris’s shoulder.

If she doesn’t understand, who will?

“You’re just tired… just look, everything’s working out great. You finally met Lana, and today you’ll spend all night having a ball together, and you’re going to see your favorite band. What could be wrong? It can’t get much better!” Kristina hugs me.

“I don't know,” I say for the thousandth time, adding in a whisper: “I almost kissed her…”

“What? And what did she do? I think I missed something,” Kristina scooted back from me a bit and looked at me squarely. “Why didn’t you tell me to begin with? Wait, did you kiss or not? Did you

tell her? Did she tell you to fuck off? Did you fight? What happened? Did you sleep together or what? And you didn't tell me!?" Kristina shot off this list of questions like a machine gun. I couldn't get a word in edgewise.

For a second I thought her eyes were going to pop out of her head. The expression on Kristina's face was changing from wild surprise to some sort of wild rage because I hadn't told her about the kiss right off the bat. Except there wasn't anything to tell, really… How can someone come up with such utter nonsense so quickly? My Kristina should write novels. That's how old wives' tales get started…

"Oh, shut up already! What are you making up things up for?" I interrupted her stream of consciousness. "Let me tell you! Nothing happened! There was no sleeping together! Have you *totally* lost it?!"

"Have *I* totally lost it?" Kristina yelped, offended. "First you say you kissed Lana and then you say nothing happened! And *I'm* the one who's out of it?"

"I didn't say that I kissed her. I said that I *almost* kissed Lana!" I stammered, trying to figure out what was going on with Kris.

She stared at the floor for a while. God, is it really so hard to get through to her?

"Christ, don't freak out about it. You should have just said so," Kristina said, irritated.

Didn't I just say so?! Damn…

"Why almost?"

"Well because," I started in a sad voice, lying my head on her shoulders again, "it was so scary... for a few seconds I felt like I totally was losing my mind... I don't know what happened to me... I can't say exactly what happened, it was like I was in a fog…

"Well try to tell me. I really don't understand any of it… What happened there with you two? I wanna know! I mean you and I are close friends… even if you are full of shit and a little bit keee-raaaa-zeeee," Kristina smiled.

What would I do without her?

"We were just lying on the bed talking… saying something about lesbians… that's how it started… and then I saw her lips so close to mine, her eyes so close… I mean, basically, somehow… It was really hard to pull myself together and pull away…"

"What about Lana? What did she do?" Kris asked in all seriousness.

"At one point I thought that she was also… that she also wanted to kiss me… I don't understand anything… maybe I'm just dreaming things…"

"Oh, you idiot! You'd have to look hard to find someone as idiotic as you! Have you totally lost your mind? She wouldn't have rejected you! Don't you get it?! She likes you, too! You were right up next to her, like two peas in a pod and you couldn't even take the first step. Am I supposed to arrange everything for you?! Maybe I should buy flowers for you to give to Lana and write out a letter explaining everything?! Like babies! Go on, get back to her. What if she wakes up and you aren't there? Think about what I said. If you don't tell her today, then you're going to regret it for the rest of your life.

Message 29

It's so cold and dark here. You wouldn't know it's a club to look at it. It's just too dark here. Even for a club. And all I wore was this tiny little top. It's so cold. I wish Lana would warm me up…

There's nothing wrong with a little daydreaming… I hope I'll at least warm up once the concert starts…

Lana doesn't let me think about things to the end. She grabs me by the hand and pulls me further into the club, up to the stage. "This is where the party's at. I've been sitting around at home for too long. This is gonna be really something!" she promises. And I believe her. The fire in her eyes is burning too brightly. Her lips are too strawberry red. Her palms are too hot. It's not all so innocent... I believe her.

We work our way towards the stage where tons of fans have already gathered… I can't believe it! I'm here, and with Lana!!! Oh, I've waited so long for this… No, no matter what, this is going to be awesome! Mixes of t.A.T.u. songs are playing at full blast, people are running around everywhere. I look up: the VIP zone is on the second floor, and it's packed with people, probably more than the people in the rest of the club... I wish I could get up there… I wonder what you have to do to get there? They can't all be friends of the t.A.T.u. girls Julia and Elena. Lucky them… looks like you have to have a glowing yellow bracelet t get in, how original... 'Cept I wouldn't mind having one myself. There are instruments

set up on the stage and images of Julia and Elena are showing on the plasma screens above the stage. … I wonder where they are…

"Let's go get a drink," says Lana.

"Sure," I say, and we head towards the bar. Lana buys us each a cocktail, and then we go back to the stage. People keep going up and down the stairs to and from the VIP zone. If only I could get in there…

I look up and see Elena Katina walking along the second floor. She's so beautiful! She's wearing grey Capri pants, a black top and a grey jacket. The outfit really looks good on her. She's always stylish, and she's got this heavenly smile. I wish I was more like her… Six months ago, I even dyed my hair red, but my hair's not as pretty as hers. Mine is straight and fine. Then in the summer I had to dye it back to my dark chestnut color... Lana likes Julia better... maybe because they're so alike? Probably...

"Oh, we're definitely going to be hanging out with those girls," Lana says, finishing off her cocktail. "Julia is so awesome! We'll get it going, too... just as soon as the concert is over..."

I just smile silently in reply. How can anyone *not* believe Lana? How could anyone distrust those strawberry lips? I agree with her. I'm ready to do anything.

Julia Volkova runs past us. Probably for the hundredth time already. She's giving someone else a pass to the VIP zone, oh God, I wanna get in there! But it's not that important... Nothing means anything to me anymore. The important thing is that Lana is next to me. So close, and yet so far. I love how she looks at Julia. I think if she could, Lana would eat her up… it's all the same to Julia... But not me. Oh, how I wish Lana would look at me the way she looks at Julia... But it's all the same to Lana.

Boys and girls, fans like us, exchange photos and magazines with articles about t.A.T.u. Lana and I even buy a few pictures - I get four of Elena, and Lana gets four of Julia, and we both chip in on one photo to share, an old one from some concert in St. Petersburg. Sweet!

Suddenly my phone rings. Bad timing... oh, it's mom. Great… now what? I take a deep breath and answer.

"Where in God's name are you? Have you *looked* at a clock recently? Why didn't you tell me you were going out?! I have called *everyone* looking for you. Where are you?!"

She is furious. She is gonna totally flip her lid once she finds out where I am. I wonder if I'm gonna have to call an ambulance…

"At Gaudi," I say, after a pause.

"Where?" I hear her ask again in an even more irritated tone of voice. I don't quite feel like myself, somehow…

"At the t.A.T.u. concert," I inform her, my voice crumbling. Now it's gonna get scary. She's gonna *kill* me.

"Wh*at?!* At those lesbians' concert? Where'd you get the money? Who are you with?! With the same kind of snot-nosed little perverts as you?! Decide to have an orgy, did you?! There'll be no justice for those two little hussies! I can't believe they're permitted to keep going on like this! And my only daughter following in their footsteps! They're destroying our children! Get your ass home fast, do you hear me?!"

Wow. She is *rabid*. She's gonna kill me for sure, now. But she may still need an ambulance… maybe I should dial 911 just to be on the safe side… Especially since I'm not going anywhere. I'm having a good time. Just let her wear herself down with all that anger!

"I'm not going home," I pronounce.

"Then don't bother coming back home *ever*!! Your father is going to have a word with you now!"

But I'm not going to wait for my dad to get on the phone to yell at me some more. I just turn the phone off. Man, they practically ripped me a new one. I can't stand to look at them, and hearing them is even worse. I can't go back home now? Sounds good to me. Better, even. Catch you later, mom and pop!

Message 30

It's already 10pm and the concert still hasn't started. The t.A.T.u. girls are still giving interviews, some people keep running back and forth, up and down the stairs. Everyone's having a great time. Me

too, probably... It's all good. It really is all good. We are at t.A.T.u.'s record release party, Lana is by my side… I just wish it would all start soon…

Lana leaves me at the stage and goes to get another round of cocktails. More and more people keep coming in, and the t.A.T.u. girls are running around up in the VIP zone… Some guy appears from over there and treats me to some champagne. At the same moment, Lana appears with the new cocktails. He pours her some champagne as well, and we mix it with the cocktails… My head is spinning a little, and I lean on Lana. Everything is super. I just wish it would get started…

"Miss, can't you stand on your own two legs?" Lana jokes and puts her arms around me. So nice...

Message 31

It's probably been another half hour. The concert still hasn't stated. I'm on my way to the bathroom. It's so cold in there! The kind of cold you can just suck up. They could have at least set up a heater or something. Everyone's already so drunk. The free booze is flowing freely up in the VIP zone. Whoever's not drinking upstairs is bringing it downstairs. Everyone's having a great time - so much so that some are already starting to feel icky. The door to one of the stalls is barely open, leaving a glimpse of some girl barfing into the toilet. Who needs to get that drunk?! I mean I understand the free booze and all... but still... we didn't come here to drink, we came here to see t.A.T.u. But who knows. I'm barely standing on my own two feet. Swaying, I have some difficulty opening the door to the next stall, and use the wall to help lower me down...

Message 32

Finally!! Yes! It's starting! We made it! I'm so excited. Some guy comes out onto the stage and gives some welcoming speech. And then they're on stage! The music is blaring, everyone's thrilled, the girls are amazing! We start to feel a buzz. This is so unreal! I'm so hot. We're singing all the songs together with the girls. I learned all of the words in a week. This is *so awesome*! Lana hugs me... Now they're starting "All the things she said."

"Oh, this is great!" Lana whispers in my ear.

"Yes!" I say.

I feel her breath on my neck. It feels so good… like I'm in some sort of fog. We're just moving to the music, and my heart is beating to the music. This is all I need, I don't need anything else. Nothing else.

The first verse of "All the things she said." It's all so painfully familiar. My heart starts beating faster, my fingers tap-tapping, my lips are restless. How many long nights did I listen to this song, rewinding it over and over again. How many times did I cry listening to the words? The cassette tape is totally worn down by now. Oh, my head is spinning... it's... so hot… she's... so close... I can feel the heat from her body… all the things she said…

I turn towards Lana… it can't go on like this any longer… I can't do it anymore… her face is so close… there's no one else here… it's just Lana, me and the music... her lips are so close... everything has turned a strawberry red... she looks me straight in the eyes... her eyes touch mine... I put my arms around her, and she embraces me... my knees buckle... I can't feel anything. Just the taste of strawberries, the taste of her strawberry lips... I belong to her now, and she belongs to me. Now we are one whole… and there's nobody else, nobody… and we don't need anyone else... To hell with them. To hell with everything! For a second I pull away from her lips to whisper: "I love you," and Lana pulls me back to her and kisses me again. I'm losing my mind... all the things she said... running through my head.

How long I've waited for this! Now we'll be together. Forever. No one can tear us part… We listen to the rest of the concert with our arms around each other. I've never felt so good with anyone before. A bottle of wine appears from out of nowhere and we drink it with some other fans. We could have got to know them, at least I surely would have before. But that was then, and this is now. Now I don't need anyone besides Lana. I pull close to her to keep from falling. My head is spinning from all the booze and I can barely stand. I close my eyes and snuggle into her neck. Lana smells so good… It's driving me crazy… even more.. t.A.T.u. finishes up their concert before I know it. It lasted less than an hour. But who cares. I don't care anymore.

“You can barely stand,” says Lana, whose no more sober than me. “I'm taking you to the bathroom, so you can sober up a bit..."

We return more or less sober. We stand and kiss right in the middle of the concert hall. The security guards are giving us dirty looks. One guy practically twisted his neck when he walked past. But we don't care. We're finally together. To hell with everything else…

“A coupla hours ago my mom called and told me never to come back home again. Can you believe it?” I tell her with a smile. I absolutely do not care. Nothing makes any difference to me anymore. Except Lana.

“Don’t worry. We’ll think of something. We’ll find a place to live. Everything will be OK," Lana says. She smiles back at me. I feel so good…

“I’m not worried,” I say, and I kiss my girl.

She’s mine now. All mine, all of her. From head to toe. Forever.

“And now we gotta look for the t.A.T.u. girls,” says Lana, down to business already and looking from side to side.

“Right, let’s go,” I agree. I still haven’t the faintest idea how she plans to pull this off. But I can’t refuse her…

Lana kisses me again. Our kiss lasts for a long time, I can’t stop. I can’t live without Lana. I can’t live without her strawberry lips. Suddenly we see Ed, the same guy who brought us the champagne.

“Hey, there, girls! I can set you two up with passes to the VIP zone if you want,” he smiles, standing not too steadily on his feet.

“How’s that?” I ask, doubting him. And I really want to know.

“Just like that. I like you two. We’ll get something going…” Ed burbles out something drunkenly, and I'm not totally sure that he's gonna come back with the passes. Well, since he wants to…

“Go on then, bring some, and we'll check it out," Lana says, smiling. She then embraces me demonstratively.

Ed stumbles upstairs. “Everything’s gonna be totally awesome, just count on me,” Lana says, reinforcing my faith with another kiss. How could I ever refuse her?

Message 33

“Let's start looking for Julia and Elena,” Lana says as soon as we're in the VIP zone.

There are a few celebrities milling about. Serioga Lazarev walks past us, looking a little lost. He probably decided to walk amongst the people to feel like a star again. Personally, I don't see what's so exciting about him. And then there are journalists, journalists, journalists. Vanya Shapovalov is sitting on a loveseat in the corner with a small crowd around him. Mmm-mmm... interesting! I've got to convince Lana to go talk with him, too, after we find Julia and Elena. He’s not too shabby.

Suddenly, Lana pulls me into someplace dark, yanking on my arm:

“Look, look!” she whispers while shoving a finger sandwich into her mouth.

“Look *where*? What?" I look left and right.

“The t.A.T.u. girls! Julia and Elena!” Lena is practically screaming. I look in the direction Lana is pointing. And it’s true - there they are! Ed is already sitting next to them, after having disappeared somewhere just minutes before when he brought us the VIP bracelets.

“Oh my God! Look, Ed's there with them!” I can barely believe my eyes.

“Perfect. *He* can introduce us. Don’t sweat it, it's all good," Lana smiles, pulling me towards them with her.

Message 34

They are *so* awesome. I just can't believe that they're so friendly! We're standing around drinking champagne. Me, Lana, Elena and Julia - it's unbelievable! After Ed introduced us to the girls, Lana took things into her own hands. Just like always... We're standing and laughing. Ed is telling a really funny story about how he met Julia. I just can’t believe that this is all really happening, that’s it's not just a dream. We’re standing in an embrace.

“Can you believe that today is the first day that Jane and I met face to face? Before that, we just messaged each other," Lana tells Julia. Lana isn't looking at her in awe any longer. Now Lana is looking at me... because she's mine. She is mine, and I am hers. And this is the biggest joy of my life.

“Cool,” says Julia. “So, like, you still in school?”

“Yeah,” I answer.

“And we live real far away from each other,” Lana adds sadly.

Suddenly I realize that our little fairy tale is about to come abruptly to an end tomorrow, when Lana gets on her train and goes back to shitty old Stary Luk. And I'll be stuck here in shitty old Moscow. With my parents, who are going to ground me for the rest of my life. We'll never see each other again. Never. I just can’t let that happen.

“Plus my parents have told me never to come back home again,” I say, my voice totally flat.

“Oh, they don’t want that. I’m sure your parents will welcome you back home with open arms tomorrow - no, even today. They're just worried about you. They want you to be happy," Lena tells me.

She’s so smart and sensible. And so nice… Maybe she’ll help Lana and me…

“They might want me to be happy, but I seriously doubt it, and in the end they are going to make me very unhappy. Today Lana and I have no where to go, and tomorrow... tomorrow she has to leave and we'll never see each other again," I nearly start to cry.

Lana holds me even closer. I feel like she truly understands it, too: today is our first and last day.

“What should we do?” we ask them.

“Well right now the party’s moving to the restaurant 21st Floor. Why don’t you come along?” Elena offers. We don’t turn them down. How could we turn them down?

Message 35

What’s happening to me today is like a dream. Like a magical dream... If someone told me yesterday that I would be partying with t.A.T.u. in some elite restaurant, I would never have believed them. I would have said they were out of their minds. But it turns out I'm the one who's out of her mind. If someone told me yesterday that Lana and I would be together, I wouldn't have believed them for the world. I would have told them they were nuts. As it turns out, we're the ones who're nuts. Both of us. Together…

We’re sitting at a table with Elena and Julia, talking. Unbelievable!

“Well I'll have to come back to Moscow somehow or another," Lana says, thinking, and holding out her glass of red wine.

“Definitely,” says Julia.

“But I don’t know where I'll live. Jane’s homeless now," Lana says even more pensively.

"Yeah… my folks will be just ‘thrilled’ about the news,” I add. And really, where will we live? Moreover, my own mother doesn’t want me at home. It's not like I can bring Lana there, too. Totally stuck…

“You come back, and we’ll figure something out… maybe…maybe we can get you some sort of job or something. Like you can be costume attendants or some sort of assistants!" Julia laughs.

If only it were true. If only… We sit with these girls for about an hour and a half, and then somehow we end up quietly splitting up. Elena goes over to her ex-classmate and other friends, and Julia goes somewhere, probably to smoke. We’re just wandering around the restaurant. There are so many interesting people here. Probably even more than were at Gaudi. I just can’t believe my luck: Lana and I are together, we love each other, and we're gonna work for t.A.T.u. No one will ever be able to tear us apart...

We hold hands and walk around the restaurant. Suddenly Lana starts to pull me somewhere again. Where to this time? My head is spinning from the countless drinks, and everything seems a little blurry.

“Look, Mitrofanov is over there. Let's go get a picture with him, it'd be cool," says Lana.

“Yeah, cool,” I say, and we make our way over to him, trying not to fall on the way there.

“Hi!” Lana says to Mitrofanov in a businesslike manner. I stand there smiling with all 32 of my teeth. I probably shouldn’t have had so much to drink. Oh well. It’s a little late now. Just try not to fall on him…

“Can we take a picture with you?” Lana asks, poking me in the side.

“Yes-yes-yes!” I add, trying to find the camera in my bag.

Really, I shouldn't have had so much to drink. Gonna drop the camera… or I guess I could use my cell phone. But it wouldn't come out as good... want a good photo... where did this camera come from, anyway? Ohhhh yeah, I brought it from home. It's my camera... Damn! How'd I get so drunk?

I give the camera to someone and stand with Lana and Mitrofanov. Someone takes our pictures and I sort of slither away. Lana wants to stay and say something, but then we see Ed approaching. He spots us right away and starts waving at us. Why not party with him, too? We can do anything we want tonight.

"Shall we?" Lana asks.

"We shall," I say right away, agreeing so quickly, as quickly as I can in my state. It's not fair, I drank as much as Lana did, maybe even less, and she's practically sober. In any case, she's not wobbly.

Lana takes me by the hand and we make our way towards our new acquaintance. Oh, good thing I didn't forget to take my camera back. I'm on top of things tonight...

Message 36

He's hilarious. I'm liking it here more and more every minute.

Then Lana's phone rings. We both jump. Who could be calling at this hour? Lana digs in her backpack for her cell phone, turning pale with every second.

"It's my mom. It's definitely her," my girl mumbles. I'm tensing up, too. "Found it! It's not her! What's this? I don't know this number," Lana exhales.

"It's Kristina. Who else could it be? I left her Lana's number. It's not cool to scare people like that. Oh, right. I forgot - I turned my cell phone off. My mom probably called her, too. And I didn't tell her anything… suddenly I burst out laughing, and I can't stop. Everything seems hilarious!

"Heeellllllooooooo!" I say in between laughs.

"Hello there, miss. You turn someone's cell phone off?" a sleepy-sounding Kristina asks.

The poor thing. She's not sleeping because of me. Damn, I totally forgot I promised to call her from the club!

"Me? Oh it is so much fun here!"

Why did I drink more with Ed?!

"Oo-ooh, I can tell you're having fun… well, I won't interrupt you… just let me know, how're things working out with Lana?"

"Fantastic! We're… I love her, and she loves me," it's a challenge to string the words together.

"I'm happy for you… you be careful over there, OK? And call me tomorrow," she sounds a little worried. Maybe I'm burdening her.

"Don't worry. I'll be a good girl. Later," I promise, and in the depths of my soul I know that I am not going to be a good girl. And why did I drink so much? I hang up and fall on Ed.

"You're drunk!" he laughs.

"Not true! I am totally… and absotutely… sober…" I say in a hurt voice, letting myself hang on Ed's neck. He's so funny! Really, he is…

"Drunk chick, drunk chick!" Lana laughs.

"What're you all laughing at? You can barely stand up. I see everything," I almost have to pull the words out of my mouth. My voice sounds funny and awkward. It makes me want to laugh. We just stand there and laugh.

Message 37

I'm nauseous. My head is killing me. I feel like I'm going to die. I'm in a total fog… Lana and Ed are dragging me somewhere. I can't even move. I feel like shit.

They take me into the bathroom. I can't see anything… I think I'm about to turn inside out. Someone, please, kill me… Ugh… I feel *awful*…

"We need to take her out to the balcony," I hear Ed's voice from somewhere far away.

"Help me," Lana says.

Message 38

I must have blacked out. I wake up on Lana's lap. The music is so loud. I didn't really notice before… Besides Ed, some other guys and girls are sitting with us. Maybe about five or six people. I look

up, it’s hard to lift my head, and I look dumbly at Lana. Then I try to sit. She helps me. My head is killing me, but all the same I feel better. I hope it goes away soon. It might sound strange, but I still wanna party...

“You got pretty drunk,” Lana says.

No, she’s not angry, she’s not hurt. She says it gently. The kind of gentleness that nearly makes my heart stop in its tracks. I hug Lana. Despite my aching head, I’m feeling pretty good, because my beloved is next to me.

“Let’s go to the balcony," I suggest. Lana takes me by the hand and stands up.

“We’ll be right back. Just gonna go get some fresh air,” she tells the others, and we walk away.

It’s so cold. There’s snow on the street, the balcony isn’t heated and I’m in this tiny little top.

“You’re freezing, aren’t you?” Lana asks, noticing that I'm shaking a little.

“Mmmhmm,” I answer, pressing myself to her.

Lana embraces me gently. Her lips gently embrace mine… I don’t feel the cold anymore… that taste of fresh strawberries and her soft arms around me. Soft and so hot…

We return to the room in about a half hour. My headache is already gone. I'm ready to keep partying... I wonder what time it is... People keep leaving. I guess it's pretty late. Or pretty early… but what difference does it make? We just need to figure out where to keep the party going.

I kneel near Lana and sip a cocktail. The people we’ve met are really cool, and they’re all Ed’s friends.

“Let’s go dance!” says one of the girls.

“Sure!” Lana answers.

We get up together and go to dance. By this time the restaurant is half empty. Lana puts her arms around my waist. We dance and kiss each other passionately. Everything is so unreal, so totally amazing…

“Naw… that’s no fun,” says Ed, leaving the girl he was just dancing with. “Let’s switch, it’s getting boring. Let’s have some fun.”

“No problem,” says Lana. I don’t really want to let her go, but… well, maybe it will be more fun.

Ed is dancing with Lana, and I’m dancing with Pasha. I think that’s his name. We're drinking cocktails that seem to have appeared out of nowhere. My head is spinning a little again. I try to turn to get a look at Ed and Lana. They’re both totally sloshed… when did that happen? They laugh loudly and hug each other. It’s completely idiotic. I mean, it’s not like it makes me jealous, just a little tense. Lana’s my girl, after all… Mine… On the other hand, why not let them dance, today anything can happen. And I’m going to dance. Pasha’s got strong hands, plus they’re really warm. He’s pretty cute, actually. I press up against Pasha, either because of a surge of emotions or because it’s getting hard to stand up again.

Message 39

“No way, there’s nothing to do here anymore. We should get outta here," says Ed. "Might not be a bad idea to go to Shapovalov’s place. We can keep partying there, it'll be awesome."

“That’s right. It’ll be cool, all right. You’ll see. It’s always a blast with Vanya,” laughs one of the girls. I think her name is Masha. “Let’s go!”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah! Let’s go! I wanna go there! All right!” I agree enthusiastically once I remember Vanya from the club. I want to fall into him right now, everything, my arms, my legs, every part of my body. Hold me!!! I wanted to talk with him, and now we're gonna go see him! Right on!

We put on our coats and crawl out of the restaurant. Someone's cars are parked outside the restaurant. We get in without thinking twice. There's no reason to think, after all... oh, to hell with it.

Message 40

What a sweet building. I wish I lived in a place like this… I can imagine how much an apartment here costs. I bet the attic costs more than my apartment. It’s so pretty…

Vanya lives on the sixth floor of one of the Stalin skyscrapers. Very nice, just the teeniest bit dirty. The entire floor is covered in sunflower seeds and other debris, empty bottles are rolling around... As soon as I get out of the elevator, I’m practically knocked back - the place reeks of alcohol, smoke, and who knows what else. Gross! But I don’t really care… There’s a rug in the stairwell, with three wooden benches. The staircase itself is littered with pillows...

At the moment we arrive, it seems like the whole stairwell is crammed with people. It's getting tricky to tell the girls from the boys. Everyone's as wasted as we are. Ed goes over to hug someone right away. He's kissed at least half of the people here already.

“This is so cool,” Lana whispers to me.

“Sure is,” I say. “So freaking cool we're at Shapovalov's!"

Lana and I are still standing by the elevator, without the slightest clue as to how to work our way into the crowd. There's simply too many people.

“Girls, what’re you standing around for like a couple of poor relatives?” Ed walks over and asks us.

He takes us by the arm and sits us down somewhere. I don’t really get what’s going on… But where’s Vanya? I wanna get a look at him. Oh, yeah!

Message 41

About thirty minutes later I try to pull myself up and crawl into the apartment. I start looking for the bathroom… The apartment could stand to be a little bigger… but I just try not to fall…oops, I fell… I don’t find the bathroom, but I do find Vanya. Where'd he come from?

“Oh! Vanya!” I barely pronounce and happily fall right into Shapovalov.

I didn’t do it on purpose. I just lost my balance. My head keeps spinning for some reason. I think I might be really ashamed tomorrow… Shapovalov stares at me, shocked, for a second, just before I muster up the last of my strength and coordination and try to push myself away from him. Success! Damn, I’m smooth! I’m still gonna be embarrassed tomorrow… I somehow manage to pull myself to my feel and keep looking for the bathroom? Where the hell could it be? While I stumble around without any clear destination, Vanya keeps looking at me… Oh, *here’s* the bathroom! Rock on! I found it. I feel like freakin' Christopher Columbus discovering America, and try to slip into the bathroom. Now your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to walk in through the doorway, without bumping into the wall or the door. Mission impossible...

After some time, I manage to actually get inside the bathroom. But someone’s already in there. And they look just about as bad (or good, depending on your state of mind) as me. We split up after about 10 minutes. He leaves, and I make my way to the sink. Way to go, we did it without causing any victims. I’m surprised, actually… I wash up with some ice cold water and start to feel a little better… Hey - why is the tub filled with water? Was someone actually planning on taking a bath? I sure hope I don’t fall in - I’d drown for sure! It sure would suck if my obituary was like: “*She passed away after drowning in the bathtub of ex-t.A.T.u. producer Ivan Shapovalov. An apt death for such a big fan of the group…”* Suddenly I get the giggles from these ridiculous thoughts. I squat down and laugh hysterically. I’m laughing so hard, I start to cry...

Some girl comes into the bathroom. She doesn't go over to the sink. Instead she just stands across from me and stares at me. Her eyes are like glass. Then suddenly she asks me, with a glass voice, "What the hell are you laughing at?" I try to answer, but I can’t. I’m so stuck in this laughing jag that I can barely get a word out. I just sit there and laugh, and sometimes I laugh so hard I snort or cackle. Instead of an explanation, she gets some totally abstract gestures and an incoherent jumble of words that are totally unrelated to one another. It probably looks pretty odd. In any case, the girl sits down. We sit across from each other, just screaming with laughter. And we can't stop.

Message 42

By the time I get out of the bathroom, a few more people have made their way into the apartment. I call out to Lana and we both go to the living room.

Of course by now I can’t see too well, nor do I really know where I am, but it seems like Vanya's room is weird. Really weird. Although, an apartment will be like its owner. The first thing I see is a brown plush horse hanging from the upper window. The poor thing is hanging by a noose around its neck. Oh, Vanya, why are you so mean to poor, poor animals?! Beast! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? But I don’t care, really. There’s a computer on a computer table by the window, with a huge monitor. Well, it’s not *that* huge, just a lot bigger than mine and what all my friends have. It might be a plasma though, since Vanya’s got money. Even Sasha has a plasma screen monitor. A cute blonde guy with an earring in his left ear is sitting at the computer. Or maybe it’s his right ear. No, the left one. Christ, it’s

like I can't remember what's left and what's right… But who the hell cares? They're his ears, he can do what he wants with them.

Along the same wall where the computer is, there are some white shelves. They are literally covered in awards. Awards, awards, and more awards. So many of them, and all to do with t.A.T.u. Vanya really did good. Aside from his collection of awards, his shelve are decorated with several pictures of icebreakers, a few discs, someone's passport and piles of other crap. And there's one more totally awesome thing by the shelves. It's just too cool! I want one, too. Maybe I can snatch it… Naw, it's big and heavy. And I'm drunk. Juuuuuust a little! Plus, people would see. Too bad… So what it is, is a diploma issued to t.A.T.u. for selling four million copies of their debut album around the world. It's gorgeous! I've seen it on TV before, but to see it up close, it's even more amazing. The diploma is covered in glass and about half my height. It lists how many albums were sold in which countries. So cool!

There's a sofa in the corner near the door. It used to be white at some point… sometime long, long ago… The poor sofa is littered with an old, chewed up apple core, unfinished yogurt and a bunch of other stuff… man, it's filthy here! But I don't care, really… At first I try to clear a place to sit on the sofa, moving someone's cell phone, a pen, and some other debris. Then I just sit on the floor with some giant black pillows. Seems cleaner down here, and it's closer to the TV. Vanya's TV is in this room. It's a huge plasma one. I want one like it. Nearby some DVDs are lying around, strewn about near the DVD player. The room may be strange, but it's sweet all the same. I don't really know why. It just is.

Message 43

I plop down on a pillow, and so do the others. It's so soft and comfy.

"Let's do something, something fun," says Marina.

"Yeah, let's," says a girl sitting to my right. I still don't know what her name is. "But what? I can't think of anything."

"Need to come up with something, something…" Pasha mumbles.

I agree. It's started to get a little dull, and I don't want to go to sleep just yet. But I can't think of anything. I try to remember what I usually do with my friends, but I can't think of anything.

"I've got an idea. Let's play a game," Ed says kinda strangely. "We'll play spin the bottle. It'll be fun," he smiles.

"We're for it," says Lana, taking my hand.

We are. Why not? I mean, today anything goes.

Everyone agrees to play. No one has any objections to heating things up a bit. Spin the bottle is always a blast. Especially today… Ed gets an empty bottle out from somewhere, and we all sit in a circle.

"I'll spin it," Ed says in a weird voice. He gives Lana this mysterious kind of look.

"Well spin it, then. But spin it good," she says, looking him straight in the eye.

"Naturally," he whispers.

He spins the bottle. Ed is obviously trying his damndest - the bottle spins for a long time. Who will it stop at? Me... Lana… Marina… Pasha… Masha… Ed… Stas… Lana. Ed and Lana. He smiles and looks at her.

"No tricks! It's all good, honest fun," he smiles.

She leans in towards Ed and kisses him. It's a long kiss, a real one. Just like in the movies. Based on Lana's expression, she seems to be enjoying it... And I just don't care... Lana's mine, after all, and this is just a game. They're playing a game with each other and Lana will come back to me in the end. She takes me by the hand and whispers "I love you, and this is just a game…" I believe her. I believe her because I love her. I feel her breath on my skin. I feel her strawberry lips near my ears. I'm ready to forgive her for anything. Absolutely everything.

Ed spins the bottle again. He looks more than satisfied. And I just don't care. The bottle spins and spins. Ed is a spinning master. He really tries.

This time the bottle stops at Dima and some other guy. Interesting…

"Oops. Gotta spin again," the guy laughs. "Good job, Ed."

"No way. No re-spins. Rules are rules: whoever it points to has to kiss. So go on, kiss," Ed laughs.

"No way," says Dima. "Smart ass, aren't you? You got yourself a girl, and then what do you do for me? I'm no fag, I'm not gonna suck face with Roman here!" he complains.

“I’m not calling you a fag,” says Ed, unmoved. “But thems the breaks. Kiss. What’s the big deal? If I got one of the guys, then I would do it. Don't sweat it! I mean if you think about it, what difference does it make who you kiss?" he says calmly.

“Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!” everyone starts to try to convince the guys.

Mmmm... interesting... maybe they'll even like it...

Dima and Roman drink something, close their eyes and move in towards one another. After they drink, they don’t care anymore. They’re surrounded by friends cheering them on, and they kiss. Wow! I never saw two boys kiss before. It looks so erotic when they do it... Maybe they liked it after all? When it’s over, it doesn’t look like they’re disgusted, either…

The bottle spins some more. Dasha and Pasha. Sveta and Max. Roma and Kristina. Sveta and Masha. Ed and Kristina. And finally it’s my turn. The bottle stops at Dima. I really don’t care who I’m supposed to kiss. It’s so hot in here… I lean in towards Dima and put my arms around his neck. I don’t really know why. I just felt like it, I guess… His lips are very soft. We kiss for what seems like a long time. Dima doesn’t want to let me go, and I don’t have the strength to pull away. In the end, we pull away from each other and I sit back in my spot. By Lana. She hugs me, but almost too strongly. Is she jealous? I ask her quietly. “Course not… well, maybe a little. Just the teeniest bit… but it's just a game, after all..." Lana pronounces these words strangely, and sits back on her pillow.

The game goes on and on. Everyone’s having fun, especially me… The bottle turns to me again. This time I’m supposed to kiss Marina. Interesting…

“Well, hold on,” she says, startling me with her eyes.

“I’m holding on,” I smile in reply. This is really going to be something. Marina is kinda hot…

She holds me to her. I feel it when she bites my lip. Her hands feel up under my shirt. What is she doing…?

Lana jerks Marina by her arm and throws her to the floor. Lana looks like she’s about ready to kill Marina… and maybe me, too.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” Lana screams. “Can’t you see she’s *my* girl?!”

Her eyes are burning with a bad fire. Lana starts to turn red from fury. I really think she might be capable of killing her. Just like that.

“Calm down, already. It's just a game. What the hell is your problem? You’re just drunk, aren’t you?! Fucking freak!” Marina screams back at her.

“It might be a game, but I don’t remember groping being in the rules anywhere!” There was no way to calm Lana down.

“There may not be any such rule, but it seemed to me *your* girl was enjoying it, too,” Marina snapped.

What a bitch… so maybe I did like it. Just a little. It doesn’t count.

Lana throws herself at Marina. People try to pull them apart, but it’s no use. The girls are rolling around on the floor, pulling each other’s hair. Lana and Marina look like two dogs who broke their chains. Someone manages to pull them apart about 15 minutes later. Lana’s really done Marina in. I don't really feel like myself.

Game over.

Message 44

Everyone’s really drunk, and we’re all staying the night at Vanya’s. Lana and I don't have anywhere else to go, anyway. There’s a lot of people, so people just have to lie down where ever they can. Vanya left to go sleep at the Ukraina Hotel, and two girls are sleeping in his bedroom. Some people leave for a sauna, others go to a club, whoever's got money and the desire to do so (not many) takes a taxi home. Lana and I are lying on the pillows in the living room. Egor, Pasha and Marina are nearby. Some people who really lost out are trying to sleep in the kitchen. I really want to sleep, and I snooze a little at Lana’s breast.

I wake up to some sort of bumping and weird sounds. My head is *killing*me… I can barely turn to look and squint through my puffed up eyes. I feel like shit… The source of the weird sounds turns out to be Ed, Pasha and Marina. Looks like the three of them are having a grand old time together. Ed and Pasha are both wasted and are tearing at Marina's body. She's not exactly sober, either, but she appears

to be enjoying it. "Can you keep it down a bit?" I ask sternly. That's it. This is really enough. I turn away and try to cover my head to keep from hearing anything.

Message 45

My head hurts so much… and I'm thirsty. Someone, kill me please! Yesterday is covered in a thick fog. When I try to open my eyes and look around me, I fall into a complete stupor. It takes ten to fifteen minutes just to figure out where I am. I don't see Lana around, she must have gotten up already. I wonder what time it is… I get up and try to find my bag with my cell phone in it. After a while I find it buried in a mountain of clothes and bags near the door. When did I manage to put it there? I don't remember. I don't remember much of anything. Fuck… I turned my phone off. Kristina… I was supposed to call her… oh, my parents… damn, I've really done it now…

I turn my phone on. It's five o'clock. A bunch of text messages start to come through: Kris, mom, Kris three more times, mom again... They're probably worried. My head is going to explode from the pain. And something else feels weird. Could it be my conscience? That's the last thing I needed… What am I going to do now?

I try to chase all of these thoughts away, to just not think them in the first place. Just don't think about Kris or my parents. They'll get on without me. I hope... I slip into the bathroom, wash my face and burst into the kitchen. Lana is sitting there. She looks as hungover and puffy as I do.

"Good morning," I croak on my way to the fridge.

I feel like I'm going to barf, but I'm still hungry and thirsty.

"What do you mean 'good'?" Lana asks, sounding exhausted.

She's right. There's nothing good about this morning. Although it *is* our first morning together.

The fridge is practically empty: there's a half-empty bottle of coke and some orange juice. Great… I take a couple of sips of the juice and put it on the table. Maybe there's at least something in the freezer. When I open the freezer door I find a pack of frozen waffles with jam filling and a bag of frozen veggies. There's nothing to do, and I'm starving, so I guess we have to eat what we found. At least we found something.

I find a frying pan and other kitchenware for cooking, put the veggies in the pan and start frying. I just hope no one else wakes up. I put the hot veggies onto some plates and then open the package of waffles.

"Wow, you're so good in the kitchen, and I don't know how to cook at all," Lana breathes after a long silence.

"No worries. I know how to cook, why should both of us cook, then? We can't both fit on one stovetop, anyway," I say.

Then I start to picture what it's going to be like when Lana and I live together. Just Lana and me. I smile at these pleasant thoughts. That would be so wonderful, just she and I.

"Why are you smiling," Lana says, sitting me down on her lap.

"I was thinking about us," I answer.

"Everything is going to be OK. I just know it," Lana whispers and kisses me.

Now I know it, too. It just can't be any other way, not if we love each other so much.

No one else gets up, and Lana and I are able to have our breakfast in peace. It's so nice. The best breakfast of my entire life.

"We've got to think about what we're going to do next. I have a little money, it'll last us a few days… but we can't hang around Vanya's all the time… But that's later, right now, we're taking a shower," Lana announces, her arms around me.

A shower with Lana. Sounds divine…

Message 46

This is all so strange - Lana and I. It's unreal… the warm water and Lana's soft, hot hands. Her skin is so smooth. I'm probably soaked through with strawberry… Maybe I'll turn into a strawberry. That insane, strawberry taste… I have lost myself in her, and she in me. There is only the water and Lana's strawberry lips. I am ready to die from the pleasure of it all, right here and right now… I love her…

Message 47

The others started to wake up around six o'clock. Dima tells us that Vanya is gonna be home by eight… Everything's cool and everything, only I somehow doubt Vanya is gonna be thrilled to see us all here. I mean we can't all just move in here with him… although that would be pretty cool, wouldn't it?

Ed and I sit and drink tea quietly, which there is plenty of. No one feels like talking after last night's craziness. We sit like that for a about a half hour. People start leaving for home little by little, and then it's just me, Lana and Ed. As if to announce the end of it all, Vanya's girlfriend arrives, and she was *not* in the mood to play gracious hostess to guests that had worn out their welcome long ago…

"You can stay at my place for a couple of days," Ed suggests. "My parents are up at their friends' house in the country, we can chill with no problems,"

"Well, then, we will," Lana answers for both of us.

She's always doing everything for the both of us. And I have no objections.

We gather our things (well, what little there was) and set off for Ed's place.

Message 48

His apartment turns out to be very cozy. Four average-sized rooms, a practically sterile bathroom, a big kitchen done up in Eastern style - everything's spotless and perfect. Ed's parents are probably a couple of anal retentive perfectionists. Wonder how Ed turned out the way he did…

I ask Ed if I can use the phone and call Kristina. I already miss her, and I need some things from home.

The phone rings - once, twice, three times... it feels like an eternity passes before my faithful friend picks up the phone.

"Hullo?" her voice sounds worried and upset. Not because of me, I hope. God, I'm such a shit.

"It's me… Hi, Kristina," I start out shyly, already foreseeing what's about to happen.

"Well, hello. Where the hell are you, you bitch! Your mother practically blew up my cell phone all last night! She practically had a heart attack. We had to postpone our trip because of it, we came back this morning. Why didn't you call?"

I only just now remember that Kristina and her parents were supposed to go out of town. The words exchanged between my mother and I on the phone last night start to emerge in my memory, as does the brief conversation I had with Kristina. Man, I've really screwed up everything…

"I'm sorry. Forgive me, please. I know, I'm a bitch. A huge bitch. It just… happened. I'm at Ed's place."

I don't finish what I want to say, because Kristina interrupts me. She wants to kill me. And she's right.

"How *could* you? Who is this Ed, anyway? When are you coming home?" she fires into the phone. "Do you have any idea how worried I was? I thought someone killed you…"

She bursts into tears.

"I know, I know. I'm sorry. It just happened that way… I'm not coming back home," I mutter into the phone, trying to calm Kristina down. "Don't worry. Everything's fine."

"Well what the hell happened?" Kristina asks, calming down slightly.

"It's a long story. We stayed the night at Vanya Shapovalov's, we met a ton of people, including the t.A.T.u. girls, and now we're at Ed's apartment. Everything's really good, really. But I can't go back home. I need your help…"

"Like what?" is all Kristina can say.

"Can you go to my house and bring me some clothes?" I ask.

"Have you finally lost it?" Kristina asks angrily. "Why on earth would I go to your apartment, to see your parents, if you aren't home?"

"Well... I dunno… you'll have to make something up," I try to convince her.

I really *really* need her help right now.

"You're smart. You'll come up with something good."

"Even if I do get in, how am I going to take your stuff unnoticed? Jane, are you joking?!"

She's right. She won't be able to take anything unnoticed. I'll have to think of something. I can't let my parents start suspecting anything.

"Well… put my clothes on underneath yours, come in with a big backpack and say that I promised to give you a notebook or something, like notes from biology class. They won't notice if you have a big backpack. Just… *think* of something."

"Fine. I'll try. But only for you. I'm going right now… How will we meet later?"

I *adore* Kristina!

"I'll call you. How about 8 or 9? Can you make it?"

"I'll try. Only my mom might recognize your voice. And then…"

"OK, Lana will call then…"

"You are *insane!*"

"I know, I know…"

Message 49

Again, we're sitting and drinking tea. Just sitting there drinking tea, watching the boob tube. There's nothing else to do before nighttime, and Ed promised to take us to a club at night. If we feel like it, we can go to Vanya's place again. But actually I never really wanted to leave… We should call Kris soon. I hope she brings everything. Lana and I are slightly different sizes and her clothes don't fit me so well, and I can't wear the same thing over and over again… I want to change…

"Can you call Kristina? She was supposed to get my things," I ask Lana, turning away from the TV.

"I'll call… but why can't you call yourself?" she asks lazily. She doesn't take her eyes off the screen, even though it's a commercial.

"I can't, her mom will recognize my voice and call my mother."

"When should I call then?"

"In about a half hour…"

Message 50

"Did you get it?"

"Got it. They almost caught me, though. When are we meeting?"

"The sooner the better. Can you do it today?"

"Sure. When and where?"

"In twenty minutes at Pushkin Square. Deal?"

"Deal."

Message 51

Kristina is already there when I arrive. She is clearly nervous. I see her from far away - it'd be impossible not to notice her. Kristina has always been easy to spot in a crowd with her bright read coat. She's pacing back and forth near the statue. I wonder how long she's been waiting.

"Hey," I greet her. God, I've missed her all this time.

"Well, salutations," she replies, looking down at the ground.

"Everything OK?" I ask, even though I know that nothing is, that Kristina wants to kill me. But I had to say something.

"What do you think?" she answers, still looking at the ground. "How about you, everything going well?"

"Yeah, it's all good. You bring my stuff?"

"Yeah… here, take it." She holds out a bag of my clothes and some other stuff.

"Thanks. If anything comes up, just call Lana's phone. I don't wanna turn mine on," I say, taking the bag.

Everything seems to weird, like something's not right…

"She's worried," Kris says.

Why won't she look at me?

"Who is?" I ask. I don't get what she's talking about.

"Your mother."

"It's her fault to begin with. She kicked me out… I dunno, maybe Ill go back eventually. I just need a break. I can't stand it anymore... wanna come with me? It's gonna be a blast."

I want to hang out with Kristina. We always have such a good time… even though that's not so important…

"No. I have to take care of some things…" she says.

"What things are there to take care of on Saturday and Sunday?"

"The usual things. You come back home, OK?"

"I dunno. Things are going so great with me and Lana. You wouldn't believe it. I mean, we're together, and that's all we need."

"I'm happy for you… how about going somewhere? It's so cold out here."

As usual, Kris is right. It's butt-ass cold outside. My teeth have even started to chatter.

We step into MacDonald's. After standing in line for a while we get a coke and some tea.

"So tell me about it, what happened," Kristina started.

The warmth inside had made her herself again, and she was back to being my friend like before. There she is, my impatient, eternally curious Kristina.

"A lot. We really partied hard, it was great. We were at Vanya's place, we might go back again today. Everything's just so freakin' cool. And everything is working out with Lana," I tell her dreamily.

Looks like Kristina isn't too thrilled with my answer. I could tell her I grew wings and flew around all night, she still wouldn't be impressed.

"Just how good?" she asks.

We know what she wants to hear…

"This good," I say, spreading my arms open wide.

"Jane! That's not an answer," Kristina barks, wild with curiosity.

"So what is an answer, then?" I ask, smiling at her.

Oh, I'm driving her mad…

"How should I know?! If I *knew*, then I wouldn't be *asking*," she barked out impatiently.

"What do you want from me? I basically told you everything."

"Not everything," Kristina says, sounding hurt.

"How's that not everything? Didn't you hear me? I said everything, just the short version," I say, sipping on my coke.

"Did you *sleep* with her?" my friend asks me.

Oh, she's just *dying* to find out if I slept with Lana.

"Yeah, I did."

"Well why didn't you say so in the first place? And you call yourself a friend? How can you be like this? Shame! So? How was it? Did you like it?" Kris starts to yell, almost crushing her drink.

What's this all about? I mean, I already told her everything…

"It was fantastic," I say concisely.

"Wow," Kristina pronounces slowly, finishing her drink.

"Let's go, OK? I've got to run," I say, standing up.

"Fine then, you little shit," she answers.

As we're walking down the street, Kristina's cell phone starts to ring. It's Lana. She's calling from Ed's phone to ask if everything's OK, and to let me know that tonight the party's at Ed's place. People have already started to arrive.

As we say good-bye, Kristina kisses me on the cheek and starts to wish me well. "May you be fruitful and multiply… For as long as..." she stops in thought. "Right. You're not going to be fruitful or multiply, no matter how hard you try. So I wish you as much as possible for as long as possible!" How vulgar! We laugh and say good-bye, I promise to call her in a few days.

Message 52

The apartment is already full when I get there. I already know some of them, but some I don't. That's funny, I don't see Lana or Ed. Where could they be?

"Hey there!" A not-too sober Dima comes over to me. It's like the party never ended.

"Hi! Have you seen Lana?" I ask him, still searching for her with my eyes.

"Yeah… she was around here somewhere. Come have a drink!" Dima pulls me off into the living room.

“I’ll be there in a sec, I’m gonna go take a shower and change,” I cannot *wait* to get into some of my own clean clothes.

The hot water makes me feel like myself again. And Lana? She'll show up. I’ve no reason to follow her around like a prisoner. I’ll just take a quick shower and then join up with Dima and the others.

Message 53

Much better… I’ve put on my favorite black stretch semi-transparent t-shirt and a denim mini-skirt. I go into the living room, where Dima and everyone else is. The music is on full blast. There are empty bottles on the floor, and full bottles on the table. I plop down on the sofa next to Pasha.

“Want some?” he asks, holding out a glass of something. I don’t know what it is…

“Sure,” I say taking the glass. Basically I don’t really care what *is* in the glass. As long as we have a good time.

It turns out to be a martini, or something like it. I start feeling a little better. I want to dance...

“Let’s dance! What are we just sitting here for?” I yell, jumping up from the sofa.

Everyone slowly but surely starts to get up. Marina comes over to me. She wants to dance with me. Fine with me. She’s not bad looking at all. The music gets louder and louder, and the room gets darker and darker. There are a few people sitting on the sofas smoking something that I am pretty sure ain’t no tobacco…

Marina pulls me to her… I don’t resist her at all, and I don’t know why. I love Lana either way… we keep dancing and dancing… I can barely see her face in the dark room. She has sharp, bitter lips. Bitter like cooking chocolate. We kiss for about ten minutes. I feel her feeling me up under my shirt, but I don’t try to stop her. Why don't I? I don't know, I just don't want to stop her. And if I don’t want to, then I don’t have to. I can do anything I want… Her hands slide up and down my body, and I respond to her touch. I barely recognize myself. What’s happening to me?

“Let’s go, I’ll give you a little something,” Marina says, pulling me towards the coffee table near the sofa.

“Sure,” I say, yielding myself to her.

I don’t care what she offers me, I’ll try it whatever it is.

“Here,” she holds out some kind of cigarette.

It’s not tobacco, but I don’t care. We’re having fun.

– “Give it here,” I say without thinking. I take the joint without asking what’s in it. I just want to keep having fun.

Message 54

What a riot. We’re lying on the floor laughing hysterically. I feel like I’m going to break in half from laughing so hard. Everything is so funny! I’m having a hard time thinking. Or rather, I can barely think at all. I’m just laughing like a fool, I can’t figure out what’s going on… who needs to know what's going on? I’m having so much fun. And Marina’s here, too. She’s hilarious. They’re all so hilarious.

Message 55

My head is pounding. Everything feels so awful… I feel like I can’t go on living. I want to go home. I want to go back to mom and dad… and Kristina… I can’t deal with all these jerks…

I am sitting on the kitchen floor, sobbing. Everything suddenly became so foreign, so cold. I’m so lonely. What’s happening to me? …I want to go home…

Message 56

Two or three hours have passed…I’m in the bathtub… with Marina… My brains are somewhere far away for the second day in a row. I’m not myself at all… I love Lana, but I’m getting pretty personal with Marina. Why?

The door to the bathroom is locked shut. No one can walk in on us. No one... Marina pushes me up against the door. I can’t move - and I don’t want to… We kiss for another fifteen minutes. Without stopping at all. Without interruptions… I like her spicy lips. They’re just as nice as Lana’s, just different

is all. Totally different. I can't compare them. Her hands feel all over my body. She's driving me crazy. I can't help but respond to her. It's so simple, it's so easy. Everything's easy with Marina. Everyone's been with her already, and whoever hasn't will eventually. But who cares about that? I just feel so good with her right now. To hell with everything else.

Marina takes my shirt off and undresses herself. I feel her body and am even more excited.. her hands are spicy just like her lips. They make me forget about everything. Marina is nothing like Lana. She is not soft, nor gentle. She's filled with sharpness, spiciness, bitterness. Just like bitter chocolate. I can't see anything, I can only feel Marina's lips on my body and her fingers under my skirt…

Message 57

We exit the bathroom an hour later. First things first - I've got to find Lana. Damn! Where could she have gone? No one knows where she is…

On the way, I run into Masha.

"Have you seen Lana?" I ask Masha, who's a bit tipsy.

"Just a sec," she says and takes a moment to think. "I saw her *somewhere*… if I could just remember where… wait a second..." Masha's expression is deliberate and pensive. Well, OK, I'll wait... "I think she's with Ed in his room. They'd gone out for a walk and just came back like 20 minutes ago. I'm not sure, but that's where I think she was…"

"Thanks," I tell Masha, and head off towards Ed's room. Something feels wrong…

Message 58

…and I was right… Lana and Ed are lying on his bed. They're not just lying there, either… She's having a good time with him. A really good time…

It's like I've fallen into a stupor, I can't even make a sound, I can't move an inch… Lana notices me taking a step back. She's feeling so great... I can only see her eyes, nothing else. I don't want to see anything else. I don't want to see anything at all… I leave the room silently.

Nothing means anything anymore. I just want to leave…

Message 59

I'm sitting in the kitchen drinking some sort of crap. It's dark and cold in here, I feel like my knees are going to freeze to the floor. I can't feel anything. Nothing at all. Only total emptiness inside. Emptiness inside and outside. I can hear the music from the living room and the doped up laughter… Snow is falling outside. It's so white. So clean. So sharp. Like Marina's lips… But I no longer feel anything. I don't want to feel anything. All I want is to hide in some dark, faraway corner where no one will find me and turn up t.A.T.u., that's all I want. I can't do anything else. So I'm just sitting here, kneeling on the floor in the cold, dark kitchen drinking some shit, while the purest of snow falls outside…

Why? Why did she do this to me? My tears drip into the glass. That doesn't matter… nothing matters anymore. I feel betrayed. And Kristina's not here. She's not here by my side, and this is when I need her the most.

What is going on? Why did Lana sleep with Ed? Probably because I slept with Marina… Just because. It's so simple, so easy. Only I want to throw myself out the window because of it. Into the white, sharp snow. Sharp like Marina's lips. So sharp it hurts.

It's my fault. It's her fault. I should just laugh and forget about it. No one can judge anyone else… It's easy, it's simple. And it will happen again. Not just once, either. I can feel it… none of this means anything. It's just so easy and simple…

Message 60

The music's not playing anymore. The noise has quieted down. All of those stupid high idiots, like me, came down a long time ago. Only the sad, soft snow is still spinning and spinning. It's not so sharp anymore. Just like my pain. It will all pass. Everything's changing…

She is sitting quietly across from me. It's so quiet, I'm almost scared to breathe. In the darkness of the kitchen I can't even see Lana's eyes. I can't see them, but I can feel how the flame that was in them

has gone out. We just sit there, not saying anything… what could we say? It's not her fault. It's not my fault. But we're both to blame… Everyone's to blame, everything is, even that white snow on the street. The whitest snow in the world. So white, like a wedding dress, like the one my mom dreams of me wearing one day…

"I'm sorry," Lana whispers with her strawberry lips. Only the strawberry has somehow paled and faded.

I know why. And Lana knows why… but it doesn't matter…

"I forgive you," there's nothing else left to say. We both know it. Only the white snow lies beyond, behind the window, with the strange silence.

"And I'm sorry," I whisper after some time has passed.

"Yes," she says.

No explanation is needed. It's understood.

Lana sits next to me and hugs me. Her strawberry lips press against my forehead. It's all past us now…

Message 61

Another morning, another headache. It's already Sunday. I'm going to go home tomorrow, pick up some money and some other things while my parents are at work.

It's already three o'clock. Ed's gone somewhere. Lana's in the shower. My whole body is crumbling. We fell asleep there on the cold kitchen floor… I feel like the last few days - and nights, especially - were just a dream. I don't know if they were nightmares or good dreams. Everything's all mish-mashed and tangled up. I promised to call Kristina, I should do that tonight. She's probably worried. We'll probably go spend the night at Vanya's, since Ed's parents are coming back tonight. I don't want to think about anything. I just don't have the energy...

I sit in the kitchen eating cornflakes with yogurt. It's a helluva lot better than frozen vegetables and waffles. Although the waffles weren't all bad…Ed's fridge is filled with all sorts of crap - his parents made sure their little boy wouldn't die of starvation while they were away. The same crappy pop music is playing over and over again on the TV. New girls strutting their stuff, filling up the whole screen with their tits. I'm so sick of it… but I don't really care anymore…

The sound of running water in the bathroom stops. Lana will be coming out soon. I should make her breakfast. I dig around in the fridge and take out some yogurt, fruit and cheese…

Message 62

Lana hungrily eats up the cornflakes and slurps down a cup of tea. Then sandwiches with cheese and fruit. How can she eat so much? I know I sure can't. I don't usually have dinner. I eat breakfast and lunch, just not a whole lot - need to watch my figure. I want to always be slim and fit. Although, Lana probably burns all those extra calories playing sports, and I don't play anything. Well, different strokes for different folks. It's easier for me not to eat then to do push-ups.

I've got to say, she's not looking so hot. Her face is all puffed up, she's got bags under her eyes, and her skin has turned some sickly looking color. Can't say I look any better. It's all because of partying so much at night. What can ya do? The parties ain't gonna stop. We gotta think of something. We'll see… or… actually, I don't really even care. Just put on a little more makeup, and voila.

Suddenly I realize that I've got to look totally fantastic today. No excuses! We're going to party at Vanya's place! This thought enters my mind so unexpectedly, that I smoosh a banana and almost fall off my chair, like a dumbass. Although all morning (well, if you can call it morning, it's nearing four o'clock now) I've been thinking about how we're gonna get to Vanya's apartment… I hope he's there…

Message 63

"Hey there!"

"Hi! I was beginning to think you weren't going to call, Jane the pain-in-the-ass!"

"Same to you. I'm rubber and you're glue!"

"No way, man, it's gonna stick all over *you*! OK, now that we've settled that… Listen, so what's up?"

“Nothing special really, Kris… We’re going to Vanya’s today. My face is lobster red…”

“So don’t drink so much.”

“Yeah right, like that’s about to happen.”

“So what else?”

“Nothing much. Just sitting around watching TV. I slept with Marina, and Lana slept with Ed, who we were staying with. And besides that, well... that's about all."

“What the - what do you *mean* 'nothing much’!? I can’t believe you! Girl, you’re gonna drive me insane!”

“Well, you know… it happens… listen, I’m gonna go…”

“OK… have a fun party…”

Message 64

Ed didn’t end up coming back. Well, good. It's a lot better without him... we’re lying on the sofa watching TV. The sofa is big and soft. I wonder what Ed’s parents were thinking about when they chose this sofa… It’s so soft.

We get tired of the TV pretty fast. Lana sits up and looks down at me.

“Ed’s not here. Whatever shall we do while no one’s home?” she smiles.

Her eyes are on fire again, with unrelenting, uncontrollable flames. You can’t fight them, you can only yield to her. And anyway, who would argue with Lana’s strawberry lips? No one can resist them. Ed couldn’t.

“Whatever can we do?” I smile back.

“We’ve got to *think*. It’s a tough question.”

Lana pulls me towards her.

“You’re right. We’ve got to figure something out,” I whisper, slipping lower.

What a niiice sofa…

“Great sofa, huh? I love it,” my girl whispers, taking my shirt off. “But I like you even more.”

“Really?” my eyes are closed, and I don't need to open them.

Everything around me is turning strawberry red…

“Don’t you believe me?” Lana asked, taking my jeans off.

“Prove it to me… show me how much you love me,” I can’t even talk anymore, I can only feel. I can feel her hands, her fingers, her lips and her tongue…

“Of course I will,” Lana whispers, moving down…

Message 65

Ed returns home only to find us asleep naked. That little bastard probably enjoyed it, too… well, who wouldn’t like it? I wake up to find him staring at me. What the hell…?

“I see you two don’t like to waste any time,” he hisses with a lewd smile, flashing his perfectly straight, white teeth.

He should advertise toothpaste. Or gum.

“Jealous much?” I ask. For some reason I’m not particularly concerned with getting dressed.

“Maybe I am,” he says. And there’s something strange about the way he says it. “I’ll wait for you in the kitchen. We’ll have something to eat and then leave.” Ed takes my chin in his hands and kisses me on the lips. The bastard... although he *is* a good kisser...

Message 66

We’re in the kitchen eating pizza. This wasn’t in the fridge before; Ed must have brought it from the store. But who cares, anyway? Who cares where he goes? It’s not like he’s my husband or anything. Thank God.

“So what’s the plan? We going to a club first, or to Vanya’s?” Ed asks looking at his watch.

“To Vanya's!”

Why do I want to go back there so badly?

“Right. We’ll leave in about an hour, it’s still early.” Ed gets up and leaves.

I should dress up and fix my face, but I just don't feel like it. I can't do anything with myself. I want to go to Vanya's, but I can't seem to separate my ass from the chair. I feel soooo lazy…

"Let's go, or else we'll be getting ready for 3 hours all over again," Lana tries to get me up.

"Just a minute. I'll get up in a second," I mumble. I don't feel like moving at all…

Lana physically picks me up from the chair. Now I'm just standing there like an idiot. It feels impossible to even move. Like I'm in some sort of stupor again. Nothing can shake me out of it.

"Well come *on* already!" Lana tries to get me going. But I don't feel like going anywhere...

"What's the matter," she hugs me and gives me a kiss.

Everything's fine. I'm just feeling a little slow, that's all.

Why sweat it? It happens. What can ya do?

Something else mixes with the strawberry taste of Lana's lips. Something vaguely familiar and heady. Something behind me… Ed's breath. This olive-skinned boy with the birthmark under his lip exudes a scent like cinnamon. I don't understand anything. It's all so strange… Such an unusual combination - strawberry and cinnamon. A special mix… for me, that is… Ed's hands are warm, and I'm cold. I can barely remember what happens next... The strawberry mixes deliciously with cinnamon, and my head starts to spin... only Ed's warm hands and Lana's gentle fingers keep me from falling. It's like I'm in some sort of dream. Like it's not happening to me… but they're so close… and it feels so good…

Message 67

There were a lot of people at Vanya's as usual. I wore this really hot shore pink blouse with a slit and tight white pants. In this outfit you can see the tattoo on my waist. I got it done about four months ago. Mom just chased me around the apartment with a belt. And she almost got me, too... but I run pretty fast. What's not to like, anyway? It's a sweet little angel, and it's just my style. At least that's what everyone says... and Ed really liked it...

We're sitting on a bench near the door. Vanya hasn't come back yet. Oh well, not too much fun. Here I am, getting old, all dressed up and no one to check me out... that's not playing fair in my book...

Ed holds out a beer to Lana and I. Such chivalry...

"I don't like beer," I say. "Is there anything else?"

"How sweet we've become," Ed growls. "I seem to remember a time not too long ago when you would drink anything anyone gave to you..."

"That was then…"

I do *not* like his tone at all. I wonder what crawled up his butt and died. Maybe our olive-skinned little beauty broke a nail, or maybe he doesn't like the way his hair's done up? Either way, Ed looks a little gay. At least that's what I might think if I didn't know him...

"Shall I bring her majesty some Kristal champagne?" Ed asked sardonically.

What an ass.

"Please," I reply before I get up and go into the apartment.

Message 68

The fridge is empty like always. Who would have guessed… When is Vanya finally going to show up? *When*?! Come *on*, Vanya!!! Hmm… there's something weird going on with me. How'd he get into my head? C'mon Jane, snap out of it! Don't be such a lame ass!

I manage to find a bottle of white wine and I wander into the bedroom with it. I want to see what it's like in there. Last time, I never made it that far. Gotta make up for it this time...

Message 69

Music is playing somewhere far away. I'm lying on Vanya's bed. It's so big and soft! Well, OK, it's not exactly a bed. Actually, it's not a bed at all. It's a big, white mattress covered with linens. I've noticed that the whole apartment is done in white and other light colored tones. Nice and cozy…

It's nice and quiet in here. Everyone else can keep partying in the living room, the kitchen and the stair well, but I think I'll stay here. Maybe I'll join them in an hour or so…

My warm, comfy thoughts are suddenly interrupted by a turn of the doorknob. Someone wants to come in. How could it be?... Oops! Maybe it's Vanya! And here I am, I've got some nerve lying around on his bed, hanging around in his bedroom. He's not gonna be pleased... or maybe... maybe he will be pleased. I'm not sure I want to...

I jump up from the bed, nearly knocking the wine bottle over. While I make my way to the door I try to come up with a good reason for being in the room in the first place, without making anyone upset.

"Mind if I come in?" Ed looks into the room

Phew! It's not Vanya!

"Sure, come on in." I'm so glad to see Ed. It's the first time I'm this glad to see him.

"Sorry... I was outta line. I don't know what happened…"

Ed looks really guilty. His black eyes look at me in total seriousness. I've never seen such a cutie look so serious.

"Yeah," I take a sip from the wine bottle. "Well I seem to be getting on without the Cristal."

"I just had too much to drink then… I'm sorry for it… please don't be hurt," he sits down on the bed and takes my hand.

Is this Ed? Asking someone for forgiveness? Well this is new! He's acting strange, that's for sure. Not at all like normal…

"So you've gone all bright-eyed and fluffy-tailed on me because of what happened tonight?" I ask, looking into his eyes.

Inside I understand that has nothing to do with it. He's slept with all of the party girls, but he's never said he's sorry to any of them before for his shitty behavior... Although, I really don't know him that well...

"Is that really what you think?" his expression becomes even more despondent, more serious.

"I don't think anything," I say, taking a swig of the wine.

"That has nothing to do with it," Ed says. He gets up and walks out of the room.

Message 70

I don't understand why he's acting so weird… I don't understand anything at all… but what's it to me, anyway? It's Ed's problem. I should go check out how things are with everyone else. What's Lana up to? I'll just lie here another ten minutes before I go in there.

Ten minutes isn't up before someone else comes in the room. This time it's Lana.

"Hi. What're you doing in here?" Lana, already a few drinks in, smiles at me.

"Nothing. Just lying with a bottle of wine and suffering from various bullshit," I smile back at her, stretching out luxuriously on the bed. It's so comfortable here.

"Right." Lana stretches out too.

"Join me if you want, I'll move over and give you more room."

"My pleasure," Lana says, flopping onto the bed.

I almost drop the wine bottle on the floor. That's the last thing I need, wine spilling everywhere. They'd probably kill me instantly. I'll have to cover it up somehow… but how?

"Gimme some," Lana reaches for the bottle.

"Here, just leave me some," I say, holding the wine out to her. Lana takes a few swigs and gives the bottle back. I drink some, too, and start to feel better.

I move towards those strawberry lips of hers and kiss her. I love her so much. It is just unreal how good it feels to be together, and it's going to be that way forever. We're just lying here, hugging and kissing. What could possibly be better?

The bedroom door opens yet again. It's Ed.

"Am I interrupting?" He's totally drunk. He can barely stand.

"Can't you see?" Lana asks in an irritated voice.

"Well excuse me! I can see I'm not needed here! Except..."

Ed starts to sway back and forth from side to side, and I think he's about to fall. His eyes go dark. I'm afraid of those eyes. There's something savage about them…

"Except that's not what you thought last time. Wanna try it again?" An evil grin appears on his face.

"Last time was last time!" Lana growls, annoyed. "Get out!"

“*You’re* telling *me* to leave?” Ed is growing more and more tense. “Why the big change all the sudden?”

“Get out! We don’t need you here! Are you deaf?!”

Lana is getting really mad. I'm not too thrilled about Drunk Ed's presence either. Why'd he have to stick his nose in here, anyway? There's clearly something wrong with him.

“I’m not talking to *you*. Who are you anyway?” Ed turns to me. “Cat got your tongue? Are you always in your girlfriend's shadow? Don't have your own opinions?"

What is he talking about? I mean Ed gets drunk a lot, but to start raging at me like that? Who the hell does he think he is?

“Lana and I share the same opinion. Especially about you,” I say.

Will Ed *ever* get it through his head that he is not wanted here right now? The apartment is filed with other people, why doesn't he go hang out with them, the drunk jackass...

“Lana and I, me and Lana!” he mocks. “Aren’t you sick of it? You have your own brains, or do you both share one? What is it about this Lana, anyway? You know how many there are just like her? A dime a dozen! All got the same face, too. All airheads!"

Ed is really losing his shit. I’m starting to get scared. Just what does he think he’s doing, anyway? Who gave him the right to give my girl shit?

“What about me, what type am I?”

I’m so sick of him! He thinks all girls are the same. All just pieces of meat!

“You? You’re… you’re not like everyone else…d-damn."

He stumbles out of the room. What the hell is wrong with him? Freak.

We stay there on the bed, but the mood is gone.

“Don’t worry about it. He’s just a class-A jerk. Forget about it," Lana kisses me and puts her head on my shoulder.

Message 71

We left Vanya’s bedroom right on time. He came back literally ten minutes later. He didn't pay any special attention to us. Too bad... But never mind, there's plenty time to change that around. Later...

I can’t find Ed anywhere. Guess he’s lying around drunk somewhere. We’re lying on pillows, hanging out with the others. There are some new faces tonight, I don't even try to remember their names. I used to try, but I don’t really care anymore…

Lana gets up and goes somewhere. “Be right back,” she says. Strange, Marina’s not here… I mean it’s not like I care, it’s just strange. I thought that she partied all the time, everywhere… She's really something… There are always so many different people here, and some of them spend practically every night either at Vanya's place, or at someone else's place. What do they tell their parents? My parents barely ever let me go out to clubs, only on holidays...

All of these thoughts are interrupted when Lana returns.

“Let’s go,” she says, lifting me up.

“Why? Things here are chill,” I ask, confused.

Where does she wanna go now?

“Let’s go, it’s boring here.”

“Fine then.”

Message 72

There’s not too many people in the stairwell, at least less than there are in the apartment. Seems strange somehow (I feel as if I’ve lived here my whole life, even though this is only my second time here, and I’m already making this huge conclusions). Lana sits me down on a bench next to her. Someone’s drinking, someone else is getting high. Basically, it's the same old shit (again, with the "like always" stuff!). Lana takes a drag. Vanya is also out in the stairwell. He’s smoking and passes it to me. Of course I take it. Maybe because Lana already smoked, or maybe because I feel like having some fun, like last time at Ed’s apartment. Or maybe it’s because Vanya’s the one passing it to me.

Then I’m sitting there, laughing like an idiot. Just like last time… They’re all so funny! The bottle is hilarious! I mean just look at it, it's so long! Long bottle! It’s not even square! Soooo funny… I gulp down the rest, and it's empty...

Message 73

I barely made it to the toilet on time. It's official: I am dying. My insides are on their way out... I'm so nauseous. These little green squares keep flashing before my eyes and my head is spinning… where is Lana? Just gotta throw up, if I don't choke... I have never felt so bad in my life... my head is so heavy, I can't feel anything in my arms or legs.

“Get up. Come on, come on now,” Ed has appeared from out of nowhere.

I can’t see him. I can only hear his voice. I try to stand up, but I can’t. He takes me by the arm and carries me out of the bathroom…

Message 74

It’s getting late out. My head hurts so much. I look around for a while and try to figure out where I am. This doesn’t look like the living room or Vanya’s bedroom, and it’s definitely not the kitchen. I’m lying on a small bed, there are some kind of pictures on the ways, I can’t really see them in the dim light. There’s a dark blue rug on the floor and curtains on the windows. I don’t know this place. I'm thirsty. I try to get up, but my head is spinning too fast. Where *am* I? And *how* did I get here?

Ed… what’s he doing here?

“Are you awake?” he asks, leaning over me.

What the hell? I don't remember anything...

“Where am I?” I can barely speak.

“In my bedroom,” I answer.

Holy shit! What's going on, how did I get in his bedroom? I stare at Ed stupidly, I don’t understand anything at all.

“You got sick, so I took you home. My parents called, they said dad broke his leg and they’re staying at the dacha. It’s far away, better for them there. And for me, too. Didn’t anyone ever tell you not to mix weed and booze? You were totally falling apart…”

“Where’s Lana?" It’s all I can say.

“I don’t know. Probably still at Vanya's."

I close my eyes and lay back into the pillow. My head hurts and I want to sleep. I want Ed to go away and let me sleep.

As if he were reading my thoughts, he gets up and leaves.

Message 75

It’s Monday. I need to go home and get some things and some money. Lana… where is she? I’ve got to find her. I wonder where Ed slept… I’ve got to get up and get some breakfast. What time is it? I gotta get home before my parents come back. Three days have passed. Bad news…

I get up and move towards the bathroom. Only a cold shower can get me going. I hope Ed is still sleeping. Things will be easier without him. I don’t want to see him…

Message 76

Nothing wrong with dreaming. He’s here. He’s making breakfast. Who would have guess this dumbass could cook. God, he gets on my nerves. Someone would have helped me if he weren't around. I mean, he left Lana there on purpose. He can’t stand her. But then, why did he sleep with her? But why even think about that? He did it because he’s a slut. Just like all men. Why did he bring me here? Does he think I’m going to full of gratitude for him? Keep dreaming, Ed! It’s not like I already forgot how he acted yesterday, the asshole.

“Why did you bring me here?” I ask from the entrance to the kitchen.

“You were in bad shape, so I took you home," he said, not looking away from the brewing coffee.

“People there would have helped me without *you*,” I snapped.

“You so sure about that?” Ed turned away from the coffee to look at me. “Who cares about you over there?”

“Lana does,” I say, wounded a bit.

But he’s right. Besides Lana, no one would give a damn about me... and I wouldn’t give a damn about them, either.

“I doubt it… your Lana didn't seem to care about anyone at all last night. She was having quite a wild little time. She didn’t even remember about you. Do you know how high she got last night?”

Ed’s coffee starts to boil over the top, but he doesn’t pay any attention. He’s looking straight at me.

“Well…” I say, turning to leave.

I can’t stand the sight of his face.

“Where are you going. Come have something for breakfast. I made everything,” Ed takes me by the arm and brings me back in the kitchen.

“I’m not hungry. It went away,” I say.

“Eat something. I’ll go,” he sits me down and then leaves.

Well, if it’s like that then I’ll have a little to eat… What’s going on with Ed? He’s not himself. But who cares? I don’t like him either way. But today is weird. I’ll eat something and then go home. Or maybe I should go find Lana first? Gotta call her. If only my cell phone were turned on…

Message 77

“Hi. Where are you?” It took her forever to pick up the phone.

“Hi,” a sleepy Lana answers. Her voice is completely hoarse. I don’t think she knows who’s calling her, or what’s going on around her.

“Did I wake you up?”

“Yeah, who is this?”

She must have had a great time last night…

“Have you gone out of your mind? It’s me!” I say, a little hurt. What, now she doesn’t even recognize me?

“Sorry… can you talk a little quieter? My head really hurts…” she says, her voice even more hoarse.

“Fine,” I try to lower my voice. I know how much it sucks to hear loud sounds when you’re hung over. “So where are you?”

“Where do you think? At Vanya's,” she says.

I can hear some weird sounds in the background. Sounds like Lana has gotten up and is trying to put herself together a little.

“Where did you disappear to last night? I didn’t even see you leave. Where are you?”

“At Ed's… I’m not surprised you didn’t notice.”

My voice sounds hurt. But there is a good reason for that. It’s not that I’m really offended, it’s just, you know, a little unpleasant… but I can understand Lana. We’re all like that there…

“You’re upset?” she asks. “Damn!” I hear some weird noises in the background and Lana disappears for a bit. “...what jackass left his backpack right in the middle of the hallway?!"

“What happened?" I ask, concerned.

“I tripped. Are you going to be at Ed’s place? I’ll come over.”

“Let’s meet in the metro. I’m gonna go home today to get some stuff… I need to do it before they get back.”

I “I'll be there in twenty. Where are we meeting?"

“How about right there? Taganskaya on the pink line, center platform. Can you find it?”

“Yep.”

Message 78

It worked out without any complications. There’s no one home. I have about an hour to get stuff together. It feels like a hundred years since I”ve been here… Lana walks around the apartment, as if lost in thought. I go into my room and start shoving things into a bag. I go up to the wall and take down all of my posters. I won’t be coming back after this. I get some notebooks and a folder with articles about t.A.T.u. from the lower shelf. I shove those in the bag, too. Now I've just got to find some money...

I go into my parents’ room and dig around in mom’s wardrobe. Just like I thought, there’s a little box with money in it. I take it all, and leave. I’ve got to hurry, what if they come home early?

"Let's go," I say to Lana.

"Don't you want to sit for a bit, look at stuff for the last time?"

"No, I don't," I say, bearing my teeth.

There's no looking back. I can't change my mind now. The bridge has been burned…

We put our coats on and leave. That's it. It's over now, for sure…

Message 79

It's evening. We're sitting at a cafe. I've got a lot of money now, so no worries. Lana is holding my hand. We're sitting in a dark little corner, eating ice cream with syrup, sprinkled with cinnamon…

"Everything's going to be OK. You did the right thing," Lana says. "We've got everything ahead of us. We've got money, and when it runs out, we'll get jobs. I just need to get my passport…"

"We'll get it, just not now… you're probably right - everything will be OK. As long as we're together, it'll be OK…"

Lana looks at me lovingly. I did the right thing. Everything's going to be OK. It has to be. I believe her…

"Let's sit here a little longer, then go to Ed's place. We can change there and go to a club, OK?"

"OK."

How can I argue? How?!

"I love you," Lana says and kisses me softly.

I don't care that people are staring at us, giving us dirty looks or just curious, I don't care. They aren't there. It's just me and Lana.

"I love you, too. Tell me you'll never leave me," I whisper.

I don't know why, but suddenly this feeling of fear wraps around my heart. I look at Lana and I'm scared. I'm scared she's going to leave. She'll leave me for someone else, and I'll be left alone. Alone. Forever.

"What's the matter with you?" she smiles.

"I don't know. Just say it. I need you to say it…"

"You know damn well. I will never leave you. We're going to be together forever. No matter what happens…"

We sit there for another hour drinking coffee. Then we have some more ice cream. It feels so good to be together. And we don't need anyone else…

Message 80

It's hot in here. Really hot… Ed is with us, too. I didn't invite him - Lana did. What does she want with him? It'd be a lot better here without him. He's practically clinging to me. His expression is freaking me out. His eyes… so big and black. But I don't like them. They're scaring me… Except what's there to be afraid of? I'm just scared for nothing. Lana likes his eyes. She says that they drive her crazy, in a good way. She says she could drown in his eyes…

Lana and I are dancing. Our bodies are intertwined. As always our lips come together, making one whole… only there's that icy stare. I can feel it behind me. Ed's stare. What's going on with that boy, the boy who smells of cinnamon? This is not the first time I've asked myself this question…

Message 81

"Let's go dance, Lana," says Ed, drinking a cocktail.

I thought he didn't like Lana…

"Sure, let's go," she says.

Fine, let them. Even if I don't like Ed. They get up and go to the dance floor, and I'm left with Pasha, Stas, Masha, Kristina, Dima and a glass of tequila. We're just sitting around and talking about nothing. Just like always… I can't relax, I keep thinking about Ed and Lana. I throw a tense glance in the direction of the dance floor. They're pulled close against each other. Ed has his arm around her, and she's smiling at him. Then they kiss. A long, passionate kiss. Damn! Why is she doing this?! Didn't she get enough, already?! Lana is showing off, and I'll forgive her. Always. That's just the way she is. She can't belong to just one person. I'll just have to be happy that she love me, and me alone. And forgive her. It can't be any other way, not for me, not for her.

Having danced to their heart's content, Lana and Ed sit back down at our table. Lana smiles and kisses me. What can I do? Ed seems gloomy, and takes a shot of tequila, chasing it with a huge piece of pizza. What else is this jerk going to take next?! He's kissed my girlfriend dozens of times now, and it's still not enough. Ed keeps looking at me. His expression is so cold. It's so cold it burns. I can't stand him any longer.

"What's the problem?!" I bark at him, annoyed.

"Nothing. What are you talking about?" he asks, looking me straight in the eye.

"What're you staring at me like that for? I'm sick of it. What's the problem?"

Ed lights up a cigarette and doesn't say anything for a while.

"Nothing. I have to look at someone, and there you are." he says.

"Well, stop it. I don't like it." I say. I know there's something he's not telling me.

I am so sick of him.

"Settle down, darling," Lana interrupts us.

Right on time, like always. Only Lana can't calm me down. She sits me on her lap and strokes my neck… Ed gives her a hostile look. You'd never guess he was playing tonsil hockey with her a mere two minutes ago. Idiot...

But my talk with Ed has come to and end and I sit quietly, blissfully on Lana's lap.

Message 82

It is so hot in here. It's like a steam room or something. I reluctantly get off of Lana's lap and go to splash my face and freshen my makeup. I just can't sit here any longer. And it's so smoky in there.

I'm halfway there when Ed catches up to me. He rudely grabs me by the elbow and turns me to him.

"Some nerve you've got!"

His eyes are on fire, he looks crazy. His palms are burning hot. He's had no small amount to drink. What does he want with me, anyway? What'd I do to him?

"Me!? You're the one with all the nerve!" he yells.

I look at him, scared. I don't have any idea what he's talking about.

"You don't notice anything besides your Lana! You're just a blind fool!"

"What should I be noticing besides the girl that I love?!" I scream back at him, trying to pull away from him."

"You're an idiot! You should at least notice that Lana of yours is the biggest slut in town! She's practically slept with everyone by now! I mean I was just all over her, right in front of you!" he yells at me, holding onto my arm even more strongly.

"What's it to you? It's none of your business! Lana loves me, and all those guys don't mean anything to her! She's just having fun. It doesn't mean anything," I say.

I don't want to think about it… My poor elbow!

"And you? What's wrong with you? Following her around like a sheep, agreeing to everything she says?! You can't see anything going on around you!"

"What difference does it make to you? Who else am I supposed to see?!" I ask for the thousandth time. "Lemme go. You're hurting me…"

Ed lets me go, but he's not done yet. He's clearly lost his shit. I'm getting scared, actually…

"Everyone." He says. "Everyone can see what a whore your girlfriend is! Unlike you, she's not a lesbian. Lana is sleeping with you just for fun, and she's got me for her soul…me, and a dozen other guys!"

I slap him in the face.

"What right do you have talking that shit?! You think you can do anything you want?! I scream. "Now I know what's really going on! You've just fallen for Lana! That's why you're so angry. I mean you've had all the other girls!"

"Not all of them…" he says, pushing me against the wall suddenly. I can almost taste the cinnamon he exudes.

"You are so stupid," he whispers.

Ed is so close to me. So close. I am so stupid…

"Let me go!" I try to twist out of his grasp, but it's no use.

“You drive me crazy,” Ed whispers, and his breath envelops me, he kisses my lips.

“Let me go!” I scream, pushing him back…

Message 83

What an asshole! All men are the same! Rude-ass dogs, all of them. That's all they are - dogs. They only want one thing, and if they can't get it, then they do anything they have to. What a jerk! I hate him! He doesn’t give a shit about what I feel. No one does… Now I really understand that I can only have a relationship with a woman. Only a girl can understand another girl. We’re not rough and gruff like they are. We just love, and that’s all.

Message 84

“Let’s go somewhere else,” I tell Lana. I returned to the table. I had gone to cool off after Ed's little explosion.

“What’s the matter?” she asks, like a child.

For a second, Lana looks exactly like a little angel. A sweet little angel; God knows, she’s no angel…

“I’m sick of it here. I’m starting to tense up. This place is so dull,” I lie.

But why am I lying? I’m just not telling her exactly why I'm starting to tense up. That's all.

“Fine. Let’s go…” Lana says, thinking. “Shall we head off to Vanya’s? There’s no way you can tense up there…”

“Let’s go,” I say, ready to leave.

I’m always up for going to Vanya’s place. And I don’t even know why…

Message 85

Just like always: people smoking up in the stairwell, weird-ass people inside the apartment, and everyone’s walking around in a daze, without paying much attention to the people around them. And Vanya at the center of it. It’s just so awesome here, and I don’t really even know why…

We slip into the apartment and say hi to everyone (we already know lots of them, now - awesome!!). Then I go into the kitchen so I can see if there's anything to drink in the fridge. Lana goes out to the stairwell. It's a good thing Ed isn't with us.

I find some OJ in the fridge. My favorite - and it’s nice and cold, too. It just doesn’t get better than this. Some girl comes into the kitchen and starts looking in the fridge, too. I don’t know her.

“Damn. It’s empty. There’s nothing in her at all,” she drawls out unhappily.

“There’s nothing ever in here,” I say, finishing the last of the juice.

"Yeah, I know. I'm just starving," she says flatly.

She sits on a chair and looks out the window. It’s like that for about fifteen minutes, and then her cell rings. She lazily gets her phone out and turns it off after saying “I’m sleeping…” Then she pulls her knees in towards her chest and goes back to staring out the window. The light is dim, and the girl’s hair looks magical in the light from the window. She's actually really pretty, I want to take a picture of her like that, in that position. It would come out beautiful. It's girls like her who have portraits painted.

Message 86

Lana is sitting in the stairwell smoking. Vanya is next to her, also smoking. They’re talking about something. I sit near them, just like last time. Vanya offers me a joint. This time I say no. After my bitter experience from last time, I know I should not mix alcohol and weed. Too bad… I’m just sitting here now, sipping wine and listening to Vanya and Lana.

“Who are lunatics?" Lana asks, looking at Vanya questioningly. She takes another drag.

“Lunatics, lunatics,” Vanya says.

Damn! What the hell kind of stupid conversation is this? I mean I understand that they're high, but still...

“You’ve never ‘lunaticked’ before? Never got up from bed at night? … are you a lunatic?" Lana asks, looking askance at her joint.

I try to imagine a lunaticked-out Vanya. Hilarious! Ha ha ha!

“I don’t know. I’ll look now,” he says pensively, then sits quiet for some time. "Lunatics are followers of the moon, fans of the night."

My God! What a load of garbage! That must be some good weed. But it sounds pretty… “followers of the moon"...

“That doesn’t help!” Lana laughs.

I put my head on Vanya’s shoulder. He looks at me and keeps thinking (if you can call it thinking).

“What doesn’t help? Do they need help?” He asks Lana.

“Yes,” she says.

The thread of their conversation is totally lost to me. Whatever...

“Is something not working out for them?” Vanya asks again.

OK: Vanya’s warm shoulder, his voice and Lana's voice, my eyes closed and these crazy, nonsensical conversations.

“They want to get to the moon, but they're not getting there, are they?" Lana continues.

“Lunatics - fans of the night, that want to go to the moon,” Vanya pronounces seriously and takes another drag.

“It’s a tragedy! They can’t get there,” Lana sums it up and also takes another hit.

It’s a pretty little definition: “lunatics are fans of the night who want to get to the moon but can’t…” I’ll have to remember that…

“But what’s the tragedy? I mean they don’t want to go to the sun. Did you ask them?” Vanya asks.

“I was walking around once at night,” Lana recalls, not answering the question.

I didn’t know about this…

“I walk around a lot at night,” Vanya smiles. “I don’t see that. I feel it.”

“Were you asleep?” Lana asks.

Their conversation is interrupted when Olya comes out into the stairwell and takes Vanya into the apartment. Lana still can't figure out if Vanya ever went walking in his sleep...

Message 87

I scoot closer to Lana. She puts out her joint and hugs me. Everything is so calm, so right…

“It’s so much fun here,” I say. “Are we going to spend the night?”

“Probably,” she says. “The metro’s already closed. We won't make it to Ed's place..."

“I don’t like Ed’s place. I don’t like Ed. Let’s look for another place," I suggest, giving Lana an unhappy look.

“What’s not to like about him?” She asks, surprised. “Ed’s a great guy. He’s easy going and fun to be around. Besides, where else are we gonna live? At Vanya’s? Right…” Lana argues.

“Why? It wouldn’t be so bad at all… Only he won’t let us live here.” I say, thinking about the situation.

“Exactly… although…”

Just looking at Lana’s face I can tell that she’s brainstorming up some new idea. I don’t even ask what it is. Let Lana figure everything out. I’ve trusted her for a long time to make all the decisions. Lana always thinks for two... It's more convenient for me, finally I have someone I can trust completely with my life...

“We’ve got to stick around here,” I say thinking out loud.

“That’s for sure. And we’re going to stick. I guarantee it,” Lana says.

And I believe her.

Message 88

It’s already four AM, or something like that… people are starting to straggle off slowly. The next series of wine bottles and a cup of coffee keep me from falling asleep. Vanya and a few others are going to a club, and we go with them. “We’ve gotta latch on here, let’s go with Vanya,” Lana says, and I agree. She’s probably right. Besides, going clubbing without Ed is going to be way more fun. I never would have thought that I would be partying with people like this. It’s crazy!

We get in Vanya's car and go. Lana and I are in the back, and some 20-year old olive-skinned brunette is in the front passenger seat. She's wearing an outfit in camouflage, real stylish. I lean on Lana and admire the view from the car window. I've lived my whole life in Moscow, and I never even suspected how beautiful it can be. There's no better place than Moscow at night. I only recently realized this, once I escaped from my parents' prison…

I look out the window and remember the t.A.T.u. release party and the after party, dubbed 't.A.T.u Come Back!' That's the very moment my life did a total 180. That is when Lana and I got close... It scares me to think about what would have happened if I didn't go there. Right now I would be lying in my cold bed, in my dark room, dreaming about Lana, dreaming about another life… About the life that I'm living right now. No, I don't regret a thing. Not one thing.

Message 89

Looks like an expensive club. I don't remember what the name is, but those details aren't important to me. Vanya and the brunette already know this place well, but I was a little lost at first. I mean, I'm just not used to it. Vanya's stopped paying us any attention. I'm not Lana. She knew what was what immediately, and started to act like she's been partying since she slipped out of the womb.

We're all sitting together, drinking drinks that Vanya bought us, but the conversation wasn't all that great, so in about a half hour, Lana and I went off to dance. I guess all this time lately, I've been partying away from Vanya.

I don't know how long it lasted, but after a while, Lana got tired of it all. "Let's go back to Vanya, we've got to latch on," she says. So that's what we do.

Message 90

Everyone's having a great time. Everything is becoming so easy and simple. We're chatting away. Everyone's talking together. Lana is shooting some desperate glances at Vanya. He likes it... makes no difference to me. Let her do what she wants, she knows better. That's just how our relationship has worked out. Moreover, we really do need to figure out a way to stay here, and Vanya is not too shabby at all… I love it here. I love these people. Nothing else means anything to me...

Message 91

Lana went to the Ukraina Hotel with Vanya. He dropped me off at his place, and the brunette ended up staying at the club... It's Lana's business. She knows best. The little girl just wants to spend the night with a grown man in a big hotel. Why not, I wouldn't turn him now, I'm not totally monogamous myself… Once someone said that I'm like an angel, and Lana's like a little devil. A light-haired devil with piercing green eyes and strawberry lips...

The apartment is quiet and nearly empty. There's just a couple of girls who have fallen asleep in front of the TV. The bedroom is empty. Everyone else left. Just like always…

I slip into the bedroom and fall onto the bed. It feels so good to finally lie down… I didn't have even one dream that night. I haven't slept that well for a long time…

Message 92

It's morning... Lana... Vanya's voice in the kitchen. I open my eyes. I look at my cell phone (I put a new SIM card in), it's 4 o'clock. The sun is shining brightly. Lana is sitting on the edge of the bed, fresh and energetic. She's wearing dark green baggy pants and a dark blue hooded sweater. Her hair has been gathered into a ponytail. Lana is so pretty. She smiles at me.

"Hi," I say sleepily.

"Hello," she says.

Judging by her voice, everything is A-OK.

"How are things?" I ask looking at her.

I already started to miss her. Lately Lana's been hanging out with everyone but me…

"Never better," she smiles.

'Never better'? Is that when I'm not around? So nice to hear it…

“Congratulations," I say, annoyed.

Everything that’s going on is starting to irritate me. I mean I don’t care who Lana sleeps with, but still… What about me? What about us? I need attention, too. I need her warmth, too.

“Don’t be angry,” she says, crawling towards me.

“I’m not,” I say. “Just I need some attention, too, now and then. I'm your girlfriend, in case you forgot... or have you changed your mind?"

“I didn’t forget…” she whispers in my ear, wrapping her soft arms around me. “I didn’t forget. I love you. And only you.”

Damn… Just those words and I’m ready to forgive her everything…

Again I taste the strawberry of her lips. Again that sweet drug. That strawberry-flavored poison. That sweet, sweet craziness... Lana comes under the blanket. Her fingers are so soft… She pulls up my shirt. Her kisses cover my entire body, every inch of it. I forge about everything... I forgive her everything... I forgive her everyone... My neck feels her soft lips. My naked body feels her rough clothing. Her hands move lower and lower… Oh, my God… Her fingers slip between my legs. Her lips caress my chest… Just don't be too loud, just don’t let anyone hear…

Message 93

We’re sitting in the kitchen. Me, Lana and Vanya. Lana’s watch shows that it’s 6:30. Vanya has already managed to go somewhere and come back. We’re eating cherry pie with cream - the only thing that was in the fridge. Yummy!

“What do you like to get at CoffeeTune?” Lana asks suddenly, shoving a piece of cake in her mouth.

When was she in CoffeeTune? Although she has been in Moscow before this. Maybe she went back then...

“Chicken sandwich. I mean I don’t *love* their chicken sandwich, I don’t want one right now. But that’s what I’d get. It’s crunchy,” Vanya answers.

“And what about CoffeeMania?” Lana continues the inquisition.

Is he planning to feed us somewhere?

“Shall I list it for you?” Vanya asks.

Even I’m starting to get interested now. What are the preferred foods of this “genius of social provocation” - as they called him on some show once?

“Yeah,” I egg him on.

“Everything! They’ve got great vanilla pies with whipped cream..” Vanya’s face seems to fill up with sweet memories, his mouth might start watering any minute now. “I didn't get anything today - now that was tough!"

Right, then. Not CoffeeMania. He was already there today. I want a vanilla pie with whipped cream, too!

“Why didn’t you get anything?" I ask, taking another piece of cake. It may not be vanilla pie, but it's not half bad.

“Too much to choose from!”

“Well if you want something, then there can’t be too much, can there?” Lana asks in a childish voice, fluttering her eyes.

“Maybe…” Vanya says.

Who would have doubted…

“Just fear…” she says, trying to be subtle.

She’s taken on Vanya’s mannerisms. We all have. What can you do?

“Of what, eating till you barf?” he asks.

“The fear of eating too much, and that’s it.” I say slowly, summarizing everything that's been said.

“The desire to eat until one is full results in the fear that one will overeat,” our friend concludes. Logical…

“What do you like to get at Chocolatnitsa?" I ask.

As it happens, there is a Chocolatnitsa quite near by. I used to love going there with Kristina and my other friends.

“Let’s go and find out,” Vanya promises.

“Are we going?" asks Lana.

“Of course we are, silly” Ivan answers.

Message 94

In the evening Lana and I go for a walk. There's nothing to do. It’s still too early for any parties, and we haven’t walked anywhere for ages. We've only been around clubs. We wander around downtown, stop in a Chocolatnitsa and eat our fill of sweets. This morning’s conversation has left its mark. Then we go shopping.

“Let’s look for an exchange point,” Lana says.

“What for?” I ask, surprised.

Why would Lana suddenly want to buy dollars or euros? We don’t have that much money to begin with. What I took from home is steadily running out, thank God we don’t have to pay rent. And Lana didn’t have that much money to begin with…

“I need to change money. Why else would I need an exchange point?” she answers.

What the…?

“I don’t get it. You want to take what’s left of our money and buy dollars or euros? What are we going to live on?” I keep pestering her.

But really, I don't get it.

“No, no. The other way around. I want to change dollars.”

Meanwhile we’ve found an exchange point. There are, after all, a lot of them in Moscow, practically on every corner. Lana takes me by the hand and we go in. She pulls out a few banknotes from her back pocket and hands them to the girl sitting on the other side of the glass. I manage to note that each of the banknotes is a hundred dollar bill. I am totally speechless. I just stand there slack-jawed staring at Lana. What? Where did she get that money? My fair-haired devil takes the rubles and puts them in her back pocket in a very businesslike manner before leading me back outside. The fresh air hits my face and I can speak again. More or less, anyway, given the situation.

“Where did you …. where did you get that?" I ask in total shock.

“Just got it…” Lana starts to try to justify herself. Vanya and I didn’t go to the hotel right after we left the club. We went somewhere else first. The guys there were already totally wasted. They didn’t care, and it’s pennies to them, anyway. Just a little from each of them, and nobody notices a thing. We need this money more. Oh, by the way, I'm running out of makeup, and I need some new jeans. And what are we going to use to get food? I took it quick, when they weren’t looking. Nobody saw me…” I just stand there totally dumbfounded listening to Lana’s speech. I don’t have the ability to say anything.

I can’t believe her. She is a total freak!

“You stole that money?!” Finally I am able to speak again. "you... you are out of your mind!!"

“Oh, whatever! C’mon, let’s go shopping,” Lana says. Maybe she’s right. Everything just keeps moving so fast that I don’t get a chance to think about what we’re doing.

Well maybe I don’t need to. Although I never would have done that. Never…

Message 95

After a three-hour exercise in shopping, we go to MacDonalds. We're practically starving. We bought some makeup, some jeans for Lana and a skirt for me. I don't even know how much money she has. In any case, there’s still some left. We get salads, French fries and hamburgers and cokes. Later we’re supposed to head back to Vanya’s, since he hasn't kicked us out yet. Then we'll go to another club for the night. Awesome! I can’t think of anything better. I’ve always dreamed of living like this. I wonder where we’ll spend the night today - at Vanya’s place or at some other guy’s apartment?

Message 96

When we get back to Vanya’s place, there's practically no one at his apartment. The only thing we see for sure is that he's not home. That's not a great sign... We take our backpacks and supplies with us just in case (we take them everywhere with us - you never know where you’re going to end up spending the night).

We start getting ready for the nighttime activities. Lana puts on her new jeans and I put on my new skirt. I just love it - it's a mini skirt just like the t.A.T.u. girls would wear. I put my hair in two ponytails

and Lana puts her hair down. Some guy is sitting in the living room, but we change right there without paying any attention to him. We're used to it by now... awesome new clothes, camouflage print - we are ready to go!

Message 97

Dude, this club is so freaking awesome. There's a bunch of famous people here tonight, someone else every time you turn your head. Oh, and Ed's here, too. Naturally... I guess you can't have a party without him. I demonstratively ignore him. He can party on if he wants to, I couldn't care less... It's not our fault we hang with the same crowd. I decide to forget everything and just have a good time. These amazing people keep stopping by our table to say hi. It's so cool to be hanging out with an older crowd, you start to feel important and cool.

All the sudden Julia Volkova comes over to us (well, to Vanya..)!

Julia! Oh my God! She's with - ohmygodit'stoogoodtobetrue - she's with the former singer of the group *boom!* Steve (actually, his real name is Sviatoslav)! Oh, I *love* him! He's so sweet! I love his blond hair, his mysterious looks! It could only get better with Elena Katina. Oh! My! God! Kris is going to *die* of jealousy! *boom!* is her favorite group. Oh, how she cried when they broke up. It's like each of them are writing their own album now, and now Kris is double happy. I can't believe it - Steve is next to me! Wow! Oh he totally has to hang out with us, Julia probably won't leave Vanya, and Steve is her friend. And they sang together at NepoSedah. I can't believe how lucky I am!

Lana interrupts my happy thoughts. She starts to shake me and whisper "It's Julia and Steve! Oh my God! Oh my God! I love him! Isn't he awesome? He's even more gorgeous in real life!"

Oh, we are so going to party with him! Yes-yes-yes! Oh *please* let them stay here and party with us!! *Please-please-please*!

Message 98

We are sitting at the same table as Julia and Steve! I could never in a million years imagine that I would be here now. Julia even remembers me and Lana.

"Hi, girls! How're you doing?" she asks us cheerfully.

"Fantastic!" Lana says.

Her face is just glowing from happiness. Of course she's glowing - she's sitting across from two of her favorite stars, plus they're talking with her. Oh, if only Elena were here, too - that would really be something!

"We're just partying all the time. We've been staying at Vanya's for a few days. How are you?"

"Super! Always on the move, from one place to another. we've got promo tours and record parties. We're only in Moscow for a few days, see my daughter, and then back again," says Julia.

"And how's Elena?" I ask.

It would have been weird if I had asked anything else. I always liked Elena, and now I'm waiting for her solo album. Everyone's talking about it, but it's not out yet. There are so many different rumors. But I won't ask her about that. I'm not trying to get myself killed...

"She's great, too. She's at the institute these days, taking exams. Basically, everything's just great," she answers and lights up a cigarette.

"Oh - can I have a cigarette?" Lana asks.

Somehow I missed the moment she started smoking…

Steve sits there quietly next to Julia. He's just looking around him and he looks at Julia from time to time. I've got to ask him something, or else he'll leave and I'll miss my chance to talk with him. I want to get a picture with Steve, but then I'd look like some crazy fanatic and he'll ignore me. No - no photos. Too bad! I hope he doesn't leave too soon.

"How is your solo album going? Are you recording?" I ask.

It's a totally neutral question.

"It's slow-going," Steve says, sipping some sort of drink.

And that's the end of our conversation. I don't know what else to ask. I feel like I really should ask something else, but I can't think of anything. It's always like this...

Suddenly July gets up and goes somewhere. Steve follows her. I'm so relieved when I notice that they've left their things at the table - they'll be back.

“Wanna dance?” asks Ed, who has made his way over.

Doesn’t he *get* it? He’s not gettin' anything from me.

“Not with you," I say, dragging Lana to the dancefloor.

I can feel his stare behind me. Some sort of popular slow music is playing and we, just like always, are embracing each other and dancing. I try to relax and ignore Ed, but it’s hard. It’s hard to keep from feeling that burning stare of his. If I had met Ed in a past life, then it would have been much better. I might have even fallen in love with him... But that was a different life. And I’m not going back there, not ever…

Message 99

After we dance through a few songs we go back to our table. I'm so thirsty... I drink down a glass of soda in one gulp and take a few swigs of whiskey... then a few more... I'm drinking like a horse. In my former life, I could get tipsy from a couple of glasses of champagne. But that was a long time ago…

I go back to Steve and Julia. They’re so strange. Their expressions are totally blissful, but totally blank. Absolutely empty. Just some heavenly kind of happy, blissful, drugged-out state. Their eyes are one hundred percent empty. Totally emotionless. It’s pretty dark in the club, but I can see their eyes are totally dilated. Their eyes are almost completely black, you can barely see the whites of their eyes. And that didn’t just happen… I have naturally large pupils, and my eyes are very dark. But Steve and Julia’s pupils aren’t naturally large right now… whatever, I don’t care. It’s none of my business.

Lana goes to sit near Steve and tries to talk with him, but it's no use. He's not looking for anything anymore. He already got everything he was looking for earlier. I leave Lana and go dance with Dima. She can rouse our pop star alone, I feel like dancing.

Message 100

“My name’s Lana.”

“Nice to meet you, Lana.”

“Do you come here a lot?”

“Sometimes. Usually with Julia.”

“Steve, I hear you’re putting out a solo album.”

“I’m trying. Even though they're rushing it..."

“What’s the matter?”

“You know, just a lot of everything… you need a lot of money, for example…”

“You know, I came here from Stari Luk… and we’ve got this one really cool guy there. He’s got money bursting out of his pockets, *and* he’s a huge *boom!* fan. A fan of yours, specifically. He might be able to give you some money. Just like that. And for a video, too. You won’t have to pay him back, either.”

“Really? So what are you proposing?”

“Well, we could go there somehow. I'll introduce him to you, and it's smooth sailing from there. You won't have to do a thing. Just come with me and collect the cash. I mean, if you need the cash…”

“You aren’t bullshitting me, are you?”

“Don’t offend me! I know all the important people in Stari Luk. I’m not the last person on the list in this town, either…”

“Well, we’ll see. Just don't disappear on me, OK?"

“I won’t disappear.”

“Gimme your phone number…”

I’m just sitting there staring at Lana and silently listening to their conversation. I can barely believe my ears - Lana knows some big-shot businessman. Well, she did get money from someone for her trip to Moscow…

Message 101

“Is that true?" I ask as soon as Steve leaves.

“Is what true?” Lana asks me.

“About your rich acquaintance who’s a fan of *boom!* from Stari Luk,” I explain, taking a swig of whiskey.

“Of course not,” Lana answers, looking somewhere far away. “I just wanted to get to know Steve better. This is so cool. I mean, how else could I get close to him?”

She’s simply an angel! As simple as it gets! Lana will never cease to amaze me.

“What are you going to do when it comes time to introduce him to the rich daddy-o in your hometown?" I ask.

“I dunno. We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it,” says Lana. “But the main thing is that I got Steve interested, and that’s all that matters,” she smiles.

I agree. Just like always.

Message 102

Julia looks at her watch and starts to gather her things.

“I’m getting so tired... I’m gonna go,” she says. “See you girls some other time." She smiles at us.

“Definitely,” Lana smiles back.

“I’m going with you,” Steve says to Julia. He starts to pack up as well.

“No, don’t think so,” Julia says, giving him a serious look.

"Why not?” he asks.

“Because… that’s why. Enough partying. See you later.” Julia turns and leaves. Steve is left staring angrily behind her.

Message 103

Nope, we’re not staying at Vanya’s tonight. He left a half hour ago with some girl. We're left behind with Steve, Ed and a few others. "It's starting to get boring here, I say let's go somewhere else," Steve says. We're game. What difference doesn't it matter where we are - the main thing is who we're with. Lana goes up t” Ed and whispers something in his ear. He nods enthusiastically and smiles at her. I can’t hear what they’re talking about, but I do hear Ed’s last sentence: “Anytime. Just let me write down the new address. I moved to my own apartment…” Ed’s not coming with us, he’s got a couple of model-type girls with him and he’s taking them home. He doesn’t live too far away from here, after all.

Message 104

We end up in some totally amazing sauna. I’ve never been to a sauna before, and neither has Lana. And I never would have ended up here if Lana hadn't lied to Steve about the money. She was probably right, after all…

It’s just the three of us: me, Lana, and Steve. Any girl would dream of being in our place, but here we are. This is all just too good to be true. Only it's a little hot and stuffy. (But what did I expect? You can’t have a cold sauna…) We’re wearing white towels and I’m sitting on a wooden bench, leaning against the wall, sweating. It’s nice… Steve can’t take his eyes off of Lana, and she is trying to sit closer to him. She’s laughing at everything he says and making eyes at him. I have a feeling that everything is going to end up like always... Well, whatever... I don't really want to have any feelings about that. Let them have their fun alone. It's not like I can change anything. I scoot slightly further away from the pair. It’s the right thing to do…

Message 105

They didn’t waste any time talking. Steve put his hand on her knee in about two minutes, and she didn’t say anything, she just smiled at him with her green eyes. No one can resist those strawberry lips of my Lana or those devilish green eyes…

They sit and kiss. She slips her hand under his towel. They don’t pay any attention to me. Well, fine then… She puts his arms around his neck and puts her fingers through his hair. Both of their towels fall to the ground. Her nails dig into his back, she breaks the skin… He spreads her legs. It’s all just like it always is, only with different men… He whispers in her ear:

“You’re gonna introduce me to Mr. Moneybags, aren't you?"

“I sure am,” she moans.

Her legs are wrapped tight around his back, the room fills with the loud moans of their pleasure… I can't look at it. I can't stand to hear it. I can't change anything... all I can do is close my eyes and sweat. I mean, when am I ever going to get another chance to go to a sauna...

Message 106

We're sitting on a bench near a pool eating ice cream. It's nice here, cool and fresh. What else could you want? It's already really late (or, you could say, really early). My eyes are falling shut, and I want to go to sleep. Through my tired eyelids I can see Lana, yawning, if she's not careful her nose is going to fall right into her ice cream... And only Steve is suspiciously awake. Where does his energy come from?

"Girls, you two look like zombies," he says cheerfully first glancing at me, then at Lana, then at the pool with it's seductive sparkling blue water.

Well, it *would* have been seductive if I wasn't so tired.

"What do you say about going for a swim?" Steve sasys.

"What do you mean, go for a swim?" I say sleepily, barely able to get the ice cream into my mouth.

"We wanna sleep," Lana yawn.

"Sleep?" our famous friend doesn't get it. "It's still early. There's still plenty of time to party. You two ran out of air pretty quick…"

"Well, I dunno how you do it, but we wanna go to bed," Lana pronounce lazily.

"Yeah," I say. "Even at Vanya's we went to bed earlier than this."

Steve gets up from his chair and goes somewhere. "Be right back," he says. I wonder what urgent business he suddenly has to attend and leave two charming girls behind? What if we can't wait up for him and we fall asleep? Oh, these capricious celebrities… Or maybe he just went to go pee. Why not…?

Message 107

He's back much more quickly than I expected. Steve is carrying some kind of little bag in his hands. Our star takes his place again and holds out the contents of the bag for us. Pills...

"What is it?" I ask.

Lana also seems to wake up and looks at Steve curiously. But unlike me, she grabs fr the pills right away. She takes a few and looks at them for a long time.

"Yeah… what is it?" she asks.

"These will help you keep from sleeping," he answers. "So we can have some more fun..."

Really, what difference does it make? I already don't care. I don't care about *anything* anymore.

"Well, OK then," Lana says and swallows a couple of pills. I follow her example…

Suddenly I've got a second wind. Forget second wind, it's a third wind, fourth, and fifth wind all at once. Let's go out singing and dancing! I've totally forgotten about wanting to get any sleep. Why sleep! It's time to get jiggy! My eyes fall on the pool. Oh, it looks *so* nice. "Let's go swimming!" I squeal happily, and we all jump into the water…

It's like any time I've ever gone swimming, except some how it's more fun, it's brighter. We swim, push each other under and laugh. I'm having so much fun. Steve splashes me in the face, and I do the same to him. Soon Lana and I are pouring water over our new sweet-voiced friend… I have never had so much fun before. It's all thanks to Lana and her quick thinking...

Message 108

We're at Steve's apartment, which is giant. It's the size of a football field. Lucky. He's rolling in money… Maybe Lana and I should sing, too? We could be t.A.T.u. #2. Hmm… doesn't matter that we can't sing, that's not the important thing. We'll find people to fix that, that's for sure. I mean, Lana not finding someone and then not getting to know them? No way, that's like science fiction or something. Lana can do anything. We can do anything...

We've been given a separate room. One for the both of us. The bed is huge. I haven't slept in my own room or in a separate bed for such a long time. Whatever. We're just like newlyweds or something, or… well, whatever it is you could call us…

It's already morning, but I don't feel like sleeping at all. Lana falls onto the bed and turns on the TV. The morning news is already on, and the next silicone star is already singing on MTV. I sit at the windowsill (which is really big and wide, not at all like the one at home). I hold my knees to my chest and turn on my walkman to listen to t.A.T.u.'s album 'Disabled People.' I look out the window at the people walking by, in a hurry to get to work, to university, to school... In my former life, I would have been on my way to school, late for the morning class. Then the teacher would have yelled at me, and I would be thinking about how to get the hell out of the next class... but that's all in the past now. Now there's no school, no teachers, no parents. And no problems. There's just me and Lana. And our crazy life…

It's still dark outside. I'm listening to the song 'new model,' and in my mind's eye I can see a memory from Gaudi. The girls from t.A.T.u. singing and my first kiss with Lana. It was so soft, so filled with strawberry. And so forbidden… forbidden in my past life. Nothing is forbidden in this life. You can do whatever you want and love whomever you want and sleep with who you have to…

The snowflakes fall lazily down. They're so soft and so white. They melt once they touch the ground, and turn into dirty grey slush. It's so sad... I don't like this weather; it's cold, but still over 32, it's dirty everywhere you look, and slush is everywhere. It's gross… Although, there's not much these days that's gross to me anymore. I mean, only the weather is gross to me now. And those soft, white snowflakes that turn into dirty slush as they just barely touch the ground…

I soon get up from the windowsill and jump into bed with Lana. We embrace each other and fall asleep.

Message 109

We wake up near evening. Steve is already up, music is playing in the apartment and smells of something delicious are coming from the kitchen. I crawl out of bed and fall onto the floor. I can barely hold myself up, and my head hurts. I didn't wake up because I slept long enough, but just because I had to get up. Lana and are are going to have to go somewhere, and actually it wouldn't be a bad idea to start getting up a little earlier. Lately, we haven't been seeing anything except the insides of clubs. Don't get me wrong, clubbing is loads of fun, but I need some time to get my shit together, maybe thing of something else to do'

It is with these wise thoughts and my altogether *not* wise, hung-over head that I make my way to the shower. Oh - there's a jacuzzi!! I have always wanted to sit in a jacuzzi! I'll be a good girl and ask Steve if I can use it. The response comes in a sound that is not exactly clear, but definitely affirmative. Satisfied, I turn on the water and start looking in the closet. It turns out ot be filled with different type of creams and oils and other stuff. It's like my dream closet! Heaven! Except… why would a *guy* need all this stuff?

I don't think about the gender issue too long. I pick out some bath salts and bubble bath and pour it all into the jacuzzi. The bath is soon ready and I get into it. The only thing that's missing is some essential oils. Plus, I forgot my walkman in the other room. It would have been just like in the movies. Nice. But it's not too shabby this way, either.

Message 110

About two hours later I drag myself out of the bathroom. I used everything there was to use - all of the oils, all of the scrubs. Exquisite! Now I've got my mind set on a fabulous breakfast. Steve has already left the kitchen, and Lana has been waiting her turn for the bathroom. Alone, finally, I start to feel my way around the kitchen. First things first - I look in the fridge. It's practically bursting will all kind of scrumptious goodies. I get myself some juice, a few strawberries and a piece of cake (hmm… cake again? Is it in fashion to have cake for breakfast now?). There are two small little savory pies in the microwave. They turn out to be mushroom pies and I take them out. I start to eat once I have covered the table with food. Lana doesn't seem to be able to get out of the bathroom, just like me...

Message 111

Steve is getting ready to go to an interview, and then to a concert at a club in Moscow. He's got tons of things to do, and he doesn't have room in his schedule for us today. We understand and start to

get our things together. It takes me an hour to find a missing sock, which eventually turns up underneath the bed in the darkest, farthest corner. How did it get there?

"We should call Ed," Lana says, putting on eyeshadow.

"Why?" I ask.

I really don't know why, either. Why can't we go to Vanya's and hang out there? Although we are there a little too often. What if he sends us away?

"Gotta make sure his new address is right," Lana says, " and find out if he's at home. I mean can you imagine us going all the way there and then he's not at home?"

She's right. We can't very well sleep in the doorway or at a train station with the bums…

"So call him, then," I say.

Message 112

Ed's new apartment is small, but very cute. It's a studio apartment, but it's big for a studio. I like his parents' place better, but this isn't bad. I wonder what his parents do if they're able to buy their kid an apartment so close to downtown. My mom would have said something "Just look what a great husband he would make. Don't let this one go! He'll take care of you and a family." My mom would have said a lot, actually. I can just imagine the tirade she would go off on if she found out what kind of a life I'm living now. "War and Peace," man, nothing less…

Ed is getting ready for the next party. I make a solemn decision to go to bed earlier today. I've gotta mix things up a little. I mean, it's been the same thing ever day: breakfast, gathering our things, party, gathering our things and party… and the same horrible headache every morning. Tomorrow I'll get up at 3 pm and wke Lana up. We'll get our things together and go somewhere. Even for a walk in the park. We'll think of where to go tomorrow. Meanwhile, we're drinking coffee, I'm ignoring Ed and we're getting ready for Ed's party to start. Ed's housewarming party has been going on for a few days now…

Message 113

The faces are all familiar: Pasha, Dima, Marinka, Mashka, Sasha, Dan and Valya… even if I don't know someone's name, I've definitely seen them around before. There's even the girl who I ran into in Vanya's kitchen, the one who kept looking for food. The blonde beauty still looks sad. I wonder what happpened?

The booze is flowing freely, and joints are lying on the table. There's also some loose swag and somenoe's pipe. Cool. We should get a picture of this, it'd be hilarious. It's a good thing I've got a digital camera with me, and I've still got a lot of room on it, too. I should go print out some of the pictures tomorrow, since I have a little money. If I run out, we can always ask someone.

Everyone's having a good time. Lana, Dima and I are all dancing together. I'm already drunk, Lana's a little more sober than me and Dima can barely stand. We're dancing, sometimes we fall back on a chair, a sofa, or the people around us… funny!

Message 114

After we dance to our heart's content, I go into the kitchen. I want something cold. I dig around in the fridge and take out a coke. As I go over to the table to pour it into a glass, I notice that same sad blonde from Vanya's kitchen. She's sitting on a chair again, with her knees up to her chin. She still looks sad. I get two glasses and pour her some cold coke, too.

"Hi," I say, holding out a glass for her.

"Hi," she answers, looking right through me.

"I think we've met before," I say, sitting across from her.

"I remember, at Vanya's." She says.

"I'm Jane," I say, taking a sip of my coke.

The girl looks even more depressed than last time. Maybe not even depressed, more like sad or tired.

"I'm Kira," she says. She looks at her glass.

"Are you having a problem? What's the matter? You always look so sad…" I say, looking at her.

"It's nothing… I'm just tired," she says staring into space. "I'm tired of everything. These endless parties. No one's really interested in each other. Just getting drunk and switching off reality… there's no

choice, either. It's even worse at home. That's why I always go out if someone's having a party." Kira looks at the floor and takes a few gulps of coke. "I can't stand the sight of anyone anymore, but it's still better than being at home. The first time was fun, just really easy and simple. There were so many people. And that I got sick of it. The same faces over and over, blurry memories of what happened the night before. I barely ever go home anymore, and when I do, I just fight with my mom…"

I quietly listen to Kira. She really does look beat and I don't know what to say to her or how to help her. I don't know why, but I like her.

"My life has become totally meaningless… everything started with my boyfriend. We met at some party, and that's back when I wasn't partying a lot. I just went to a club with some girlfriends one day, and it was one of their birthdays. Plus that night some super popular group was having a concert. I don't even remember who. Oh, it doens't matter. Anyway, that's when we met. He really loved to party, he knew everyone," Kira stopped talking. She poured herself some more cola and took a long sip. Then she closed her eyes, as if she were remembering something.

"Then what happened?" I asked.

"Then the endless parties started. It was a lot of fun, he had his own apartment, I practically stopped going home altogether. I stopped caring about everything. We went to all of the clubs, all of the party apartments... It was really a lot of fun. Max - that was his name - shot up. That was his only flaw. Except I only paid attention to that in the beginning. Later it seemed fun. He would become totally strange, he said the weirdest stuff… He offered me some, but I limited myself to Vanya's weed. I sniffed some stuff a coupla times, but I didn't really like it. Anyway everything was great. Hanging out with celebrities, partying without them... like a never ending holiday. And then..." Kira stopped again.

I think tears seem to be welling up in her eyes. What on earth happened? I mean, sure, if they broke up, then yeah. If Kira and Max were still together, then I would have met him, and Kira would be talking about him in the present tense.

"What then?" I ask

"…then… at one of the parties, he took too much. He wasn't enjoying it for long. He mixed up the door and the window. And we were all drunk, and we couldn't… it was the seventh floor. The neighbors called an ambulance - we were too out of it, we didn't even figure out what was going on right away… it was too late. I remember how I was throwing up on the street, totally wasted. I had no money, I had nothing… I had no where to go. The cops had come, they started checking people, saying things… I crawled outside. I don't remember where I spent the night, probably in some disgusting, cold doorway. Then, taht was it. A week passed, and we were at it again. I could stand to see anyone at home. It all started up again. It was impossible to stop. I got so high, I was practically a zombie, and I spent several nights at Vanya's, at Ed's place, and there were other girls… it seemed easy and simple... but it's not all so simple… I started going clubbing again, only without Max. I didn't care anymore... or that's what I thought. I ran into these famous guys again, and again everyone was drinking all the time. They had everything… and I took everything…

I sat there without saying a word. There was nothing I could say.

Kira's face had turned grey.

"And then one fine day, I woke up in a strange apartment. Just like always. With strangers who didn't give two shits about me. I realized how sick of it I am. I remembered Max. I think about him a lot. I think about the life I used to live a lot, my mom, my friends… I barely ever see them anymore. I miss it, but there's nothing else I can do. My parents think I'm a slut, and I keep smoking more and more. I want to quit, but I'm afraid I'll move on to something stronger, like Max did… I really want to quit, but I can't. I've become so weak. I can't quit, it's the only way I forget about how lonely I am… You know… I dunno…why should I keep living? I keep looking out the window, thinking that maybe Max didn't mix anything up at all. Maybe he was just sick of it all, only he forgot to take me with him…

Message 115

We're sitting there just staring at the floor. People periodically come into the kitchen, get something to drink and leave, without noticing us at all. The bathroom door slams and someone starts puking their guts out. We can hear music and loud laughter from the other rooms. Everyone's having a grand old time… I was too, about 20 minutes ago. But Kira's story has made a huge impression on me. I wonder where Lana is right now? Where are we going to be in a month? I look at abandoned Kira, who's

lost any prospects for a bright future (or does it just seem that way to me? Maybe that's just how she is? Maybe things will still work out for her…)Then I wonder what's going to happen to Lana and I. How are we going to keep living? I look at Kira. She's a really pretty girl. She could be a model for an artist. It's almost as if she's stepped out of a painting from the Renaissance era, like she's a live version of an ancient Greek statue… but she's stagnating in our swamp. Losing that beauty of hers… so much potential, and she's not using it. She knows lots of important people, after all. She only has to ask, and she could have it all. She could sing, she could speak, she could pose for the camera. There are a lot of pretty girls out there, but Kira is really beautiful, unusually so. I mean I wouldn't change anything between me and Lana for the world, but it's really a shame that this girl is fading away…

Message 116

My sad thoughts are interrupted as Lana appears in the doorway. She looks at me with some surprise and goes over to the freezer. Lana doesn't look at me as she takes out a huge container of ice cream.

"What are you doing here?" she asks. "You disappeared without saying anything. We were looking for you, and you're sitting here all depressed…"

"I just came in, and Kira was here. So I stayed in here… we're just sitting around and talking. You know," I said looking at Lana, who was putting some ice cream into a giant bowl.

"Wanna come with me and eat some ice cream?" she asks, putting her arm around my neck.

Of course I'll go. Where would I be without my Lana? Plus, it's already late and I want to go to bed earlier. It would be nice to lie down on a bed in front of the tube, my arms around my Lana, and eat some ice cream. Not a bad way to end the night…

"Of course I will," I say. I just want to go to sleep. Let's lie down. I want go get up a little earlier tomorrow, OK?"

"Sure," says Lana. Only we have to sleep in the kitchen, since no one else feels like sleeping."

"No problem," I say, glancing at Kira.

"I'll leave," Kira says. "Don't worry."

"Everything's going to be OK," I smile at her.

"Thanks," she says, smilng back. Kira gets up and leaves.

"I'll be right back," Lana says, leaving the ice cream on the table. "I'm gonna go see Ed and get some blankets."

"OK," I say.

Lana goes into the living room, and I'm left alone. Depressing thoughts, deep conversations with Kira, it's all gradually falling away... I look in the cupboard, searching for some syrup or chocolate for the ice cream. I find both, pour it on, and start to eat it.

Message 117

Lana brings in a huge mattress, some sheets and a blanket and two huge pillows. Thankfully, the kitchen door locks such, so we don't have to worry about anyone barging in. I won't have to see Ed till tomorrow morning. I'm not quite as sick of him today. Maybe he'll get tired of me...

Once we make room, for the bed, we lay down in front of the TV. I am so tired, and I lean on Lana while I eat the ice cream… Out the window I can see snow is falling again, and I start thinking about tomorrow. Everything is so strange. I've already got used to this kind of life, I didn't notice anything strange about it, but now it's starting to seem really weird…

But no matter what, I don't regret anything. Everything is going to be OK. I know it. I mean, we don't have to party 24 hours a day. If we get tired of it, we just won't go. We're free people. Lana's not Kira, we're not going to lose out on any opportunities... right?

"What happens next?" I ask Lana, who's falling asleep.

"What d'you mean?" she mutters.

"What's going to happen to us? We can't go around clubbing and partying and living where ever we end up for the rest of our lives…" I sit across from Lana and look at her through the darkness.

"What are you so worried about?" she asks me, surprised.

"It's nothing… just… I was thinking, where are we going to go from here."

I don’t want to talk about Kira. Let her be sad, but I don’t want my girl to be all depressed.

“How do you see our future?”

Lana thinks for a while.

“I see it as bright and happy,” she says.

“But are you sure about it?”

“Yeah,” she answers, sitting up. “We have our whole lives ahead of us. We'll find our place. Just look at how many people we know already. They'll set us up. I promise you. Don’t you believe me?”

“I do,” I say.

Of course I believe her.

How could I not believe those strawberry lips? I look at Lana in the darkness, at her face in the moonlight. She’s so beautiful… I hug her and forget about everything. To hell with everything. Que sera, sera. Everything is going to be OK, as long as we’re together. I'm not afraid of anything as long as I'm with Lana.

“Let's go to sleep,” she says, holding me to her.

“Yeah,” I yawn. “G’night.”

“Good night,” she answers.

In the next room, music is still playing, the drunken voices are still calling out. But I don’t care anymore…

Message 118

It’s 1:45 pm. It’s been forever since I've been up this early. Feels so strange… it’s even stranger that Lana is getting up with me. The kitchen is filled with the smell of fresh coffee. Lana is running around, putting food on the table. Chocolate croissants, hot coffee and bitter chocolate…Mmmm… awesome…

“Good morning!” Lana smiles when she sees I’m awake.

“Morning,” I smile back.

“Want breakfast?”

“Sure I do.”

“How about breakfast in bed?" my girlfriend winks at me.

“Sounds wonderful,” I saw, looking into Lana’s eyes. “I’ve always wanted to have breakfast in bed.”

Lana takes out two tiny coffee cups from the cupboard and puts them in the middle of the bed, followed by the chocolate and the croissants. Then she takes the coffee brewer and sits down on the bed.

“Hold up your cup,” she says.

Lana is so sweet today. Fresh, without makeup, her thick, blond hair resting on her shoulders.

We sit cross-legged on the bed and start to eat. It's so unexpected, so romantic. This is the best breakfast of my entire life... It's deathly quiet in the apartment. Only Pasha's snoring interrupts the silence from time to time. So peaceful. Everyone’s sleeping, and no one’s in the way. No third wheels. Just me and Lana, and our great plans for the day.

Message 119

“Hi.”

“Hi... what are you doing up so early?”

“Just woke up. Can’t I get up early?”

“Of course you can, Ed.”

“Anyway, it’s not that early. It’s three."

“Whatever. Go back where you came from."

“I want to apologize. I was an idiot that time. I was acting like a real jerk.”

“What do you mean 'like’?”

“You’re right… you’re right, I know. I was just... I had too much to drink. I wasn’t… I mean there you were… with Lana… and I dunno… I think you’re worth more…”

“More? What is that supposed to mean? *You?*"

“Look, I’m sorry…”

“For the second time today. And so soon!”

“I know. I just couldn’t hold myself back…”
“You came to get breakfast, right? Well you got it. So leave."